



# Evaluation of the WasteWise Program

October 2010

## Fact Sheet

### Introduction

- In January 1994, EPA launched WasteWise—a partnership program designed to help businesses, government and non-profit organizations find practical methods for reducing municipal solid waste (MSW).
- WasteWise currently has over 2,700 partners representing over 50 sectors who commit to prevent and recycle MSW and select industrial and commercial wastes. Partners include large corporations, small and medium-sized businesses, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, state and local governments, tribes, and other institutions.
- WasteWise uses a broad range of approaches to encourage prevention, recycling, and reuse of waste. WasteWise program activities include various forms of technical assistance and recognition.
- EPA's Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery (ORCR) and the Office of Policy's Evaluation Support Division (ESD) sponsored this program evaluation to: assess the value that WasteWise provides to its partners, assess changes in waste management behavior at partner organizations, and explore how to improve performance measurement moving forward.

### Evaluation Questions

- WasteWise uses a variety of approaches to influence the behavior of partners. Which approaches—for example technical assistance, information, awards and recognition—are most effective for which types of partners?
- In addition to participation in WasteWise, what other factors may influence a partner organization's decisions to improve management of MSW (e.g., cost savings, consumer pressure, other voluntary program opportunities)?
- What can be determined about how WasteWise participation contributes to partner behavior regarding MSW management (e.g., by effecting waste management improvements sooner, better incorporating waste management as a permanent feature of corporate culture, facilitating non-participant changes by providing information)?
- What can EPA do to encourage WasteWise partners to submit sufficient environmental data for performance measurement and evaluation purposes?

### Evaluation Methods

- The evaluation used several research methods to answer the evaluation questions.
- The evaluation team reviewed existing program data on the awards program and conference attendance.
- The evaluation team collected new data through a focus group, survey, and interviews.
- The evaluation team surveyed the United States Postal Service (USPS) WasteWise partners, and studied differences in facilities that joined WasteWise early on versus those that joined later, hypothesizing that earlier joiners would demonstrate greener waste management behaviors given longer exposure to WasteWise services.
- The evaluation team also conducted a review of best practices for environmental data collection and quality control among partnership programs.

<http://www.epa.gov/evaluate>

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## Key Findings

- ***WasteWise contributes to better waste management practices among partners:*** The survey results provide clear evidence that WasteWise contributes to better waste management practices among USPS facilities. Early USPS WasteWise joiners conduct more recycling activities than later joiners, and have higher recycling frequencies for every material, and a higher recycling frequency across materials. Also, early USPS joiners have been recycling for a longer time than later joiners, and are more aware of their recycling rates. All of these results are statistically significant. Self-selection bias is unlikely to explain the extent of difference found in the survey between early and later WasteWise joiners. Focus group results and USPS interviews validate survey findings that WasteWise contributes to changes in waste management.
- ***Participant feedback on WasteWise program approaches and activities is generally positive:*** WasteWise receives consistently positive feedback on technical tools offered to partners, including greenhouse gas calculations, the Re-TRAC data management and reporting system, program website, and helpline. The WasteWise awards program reaches many participants and receives very positive feedback. The WasteWise annual conference received generally positive feedback from focus group participants, but conference data and survey data indicated mixed results on the value of the conference. The evaluation team noted a consistent theme that WasteWise partners desire more frequent communication from the program.
- ***The WasteWise data collection strategy emulates best practices among similar programs:*** WasteWise is now collecting data necessary to establish a credible baseline. WasteWise has created a powerful incentive for program participation and reporting by offering free access to Re-TRAC, a popular commercial application for waste tracking. WasteWise has taken steps to encourage participant adherence to the program's reporting standards, although EPA could take additional steps to improve the first-time quality of data submitted by partners. EPA takes steps to validate waste data reported to WasteWise, but could adopt additional measures to bolster confidence in self-reported data. While other EPA partnership programs encourage or require partners to submit environmental data normalized for external factors (i.e., economic conditions), OMB has precluded WasteWise from collecting normalized data. WasteWise emulates other data quality best practices identified across partnership programs.

## Recommendations

The evaluation team suggests that EPA:

- Increase communications from EPA to WasteWise partners.
- Promote communications among WasteWise partners by providing an online venue for networking.
- In absence of additional program funding, consider recasting the conference as an awards ceremony.
- Keep a focus on offering high-value technical tools to partners.
- Invest in enhancements to the WasteWise Re-TRAC system to improve the efficiency of reviewing reported data, and collect information on the potential benefits of WasteWise through the annual reporting process.
- As resources allow, conduct research into the potential spillover effects of the WasteWise program.
- Develop high-level communications around the interplay of factors that encourage firms to make decisions on waste management and other environmental issues.

## Contact(s)

- Terell Lasane, EPA Evaluation Support Division, [lasane.terell@epa.gov](mailto:lasane.terell@epa.gov)
- John Cross, EPA ORCR, [cross.johnf@epa.gov](mailto:cross.johnf@epa.gov)
- Terry Grist, EPA ORCR, [grist.terry@epa.gov](mailto:grist.terry@epa.gov)

**Report Link:** <http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/impact.htm>

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