

# KING COUNTY SOLID WASTE DIVISION 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



*Solid Waste Division employees at the Cedar Hills landfill repair shop*



**King County**

Department of  
Natural Resources and Parks  
**Solid Waste Division**

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## Message from the Director

I am pleased to present the Solid Waste Division's 2023 Annual Report, which highlights our major achievements in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal. 2023 was yet another busy year for the Solid Waste Division as we continued to provide the resources and services our customers, partners, and community members expect of us.

This past year was an especially important one for our division as we celebrated the launch of our Re+ program – the County's approach to creating a more sustainable and equitable solid waste system. Re+ is a critical piece of King County's climate strategy and it will help extend the life of the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill.



Some of our Re+ achievements this year include investing in dozens of local businesses, community organizations, and cities through our Re+ Circular Economy Grants, Renew Seed Grants, and Re+ City Grants. We've also taken steps to expand our single-family organics collection through a major public engagement campaign and investigated new technologies to capture more recyclable materials from our waste before it reaches the landfill. Twenty-five of our city partners have signed our Re+ Pledge reaffirming a shared commitment between cities and the County to work together to better align our recycling and waste services.

Our team has also worked tirelessly to collaborate with our community as we advance work to modernize our transfer system and improve waste services. In 2023, the Solid Waste Division broke ground on the South County Recycling and Transfer Station Project that will replace the outdated Algona Transfer Station, and continued the siting and environmental process for the future Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project that will replace the aging Houghton Transfer Station.

The Division's dynamic workforce also advanced projects to plan for more landfill capacity, prepare for updated residential curbside collection bills and disposal fees, and prioritized ongoing efforts to advance equity and social justice here in the workplace and in our community.

I am immensely proud of our employees and the Division for everything we've accomplished in the past year. In addition to our valued staff, our work wouldn't be possible without the support of our customers, partnering cities, advisory committees, the King County Executive, and the King County Council.

As we review our achievements, I am also reminded that we have more work ahead of us. Together, we will continue to build on our past successes, look for new opportunities, and meet the challenges that come next.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "F. D. McLaughlin". The signature is stylized and cursive.

## About the Solid Waste Division

The Solid Waste Division (Division) of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) is guided by King County’s Strategic Climate Action Plan goal of consumption and materials management, as well as the Division’s vision to achieve zero waste of resources and to enhance the environment through collaboration and innovation. The Division operates eight transfer stations, two rural drop boxes, and the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill, the only operational landfill in the county. Solid Waste Division community partners include haulers and cities, as well as residents and business owners in unincorporated King County and 37 cities throughout the county, with the exception of Seattle and Milton, which are part of separate solid waste systems. The Solid Waste Division’s mission is to deliver value to its customers and stakeholders, and to continuously improve waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.

## Waste Prevention and Recycling

Whether it is fostering the next generation of environmental stewards, encouraging customers to recycle more and recycle right, or working to divert recyclable materials away from the landfill, the Solid Waste Division is committed to enhancing waste prevention and recycling in King County.

### Recycling and organics collection decline slightly, recycling programs expand

Curbside recycling collection during the period of November 2022 – October 2023 increased by about two percent, or about 5,100 tons, compared to the previous year. Food and yard waste collection dropped by about nine percent, a little over 17,200 tons.<sup>1</sup>

In 2023 the Division collected 30,325 tons of recyclable material at its transfer stations and drop boxes, a 13 percent decrease compared to 2022. Yard waste continues to be the most recycled material, with 15,231 tons collected, followed by scrap metal (5,917 tons), cardboard (3,084 tons), and clean wood (2,701 tons). The decrease in recycling numbers may be attributed to longer-term year over year reduction in amounts of recyclable materials coming to the transfer stations, and limited recycling capacity due to equipment maintenance and upgrades at some stations.



*Designated bins for readily recyclable materials, such as scrap metal, make it easy for customers to sort it out and recycle more.*

<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include Vashon Island as those 2023 collection numbers are not currently available.

The Division continued its “Sort it Out” program, which began in 2018 and allows transfer station staff to take a more proactive role in helping customers sort their materials to increase recycling. The project is focused on helping customers recycle even more scrap metal, yard waste, cardboard, and clean wood at facilities in which those materials can be recycled, and alerting customers to designated bins that make it convenient to recycle these types of materials. This program led to the implementation of a mattress recycling program at the Bow Lake, Enumclaw, Factoria, Shoreline, and Vashon transfer stations that includes a new mattress handling fee, and implementation of scrap metal recycling at the Houghton, Renton, and Algona Transfer Stations.

### **Community engagement to reduce recycling contamination**

Contamination in the recycling stream from wet, soiled items, or items that are not recyclable, poses a major challenge to the efficient processing and marketability of recyclable materials in King County. As required by the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), in 2021, the Division submitted a Contamination Reduction Outreach Plan (CROP) to outline a path forward on reducing contamination of recyclable materials collected in single-family, multi-family, drop-box, and commercial recycling programs within King County’s solid waste service area.

In 2023, Division staff surveyed three multi-family residences operated by the King County Housing Authority to better understand recycling practices, and the barriers to recycling. That survey work identified many issues, including insufficient information on what can and cannot be recycled, inconsistent container types for garbage and recycling, and, in some cases, a lack of access to recycling containers. Based on the survey, King County worked with haulers on improvements, including updating bin types and collection schedules, providing bins where they were previously not available, and providing clearer signage in multiple languages. While some contamination remains an issue, analysis showed that these interventions significantly increase recycling in surveyed properties. In 2024, the County is planning continued engagement on contamination reduction, such as providing more detailed recycling information.

### **Waste Reduction and Recycling Schools Program educates future environmental stewards**

The Waste Reduction & Recycling (WRR) Schools Program allows students to learn about and make choices that contribute to a more environmentally sustainable school, community, and planet through a school-wide assembly show as well as hands-on classroom workshops. In these workshops, students explore personal connections to natural resource use and learn about environmental justice concepts. The programs and services are available to King County schools, outside of the City of Seattle, and are free to students and teachers.

WRR Schools Program scheduled and performed 30 assemblies, 100 elementary classroom workshops, and 300 secondary school classroom workshops for the 2022-23 school year. In 2022-2023, there was an increased demand for the assembly program, elementary and secondary classroom workshops, and further instructional opportunities outside the regular academic calendar. In response to those needs, the WRR Schools Program piloted five summer school programs in 2023.

## More schools continue to “go green” than ever



*Students at Pacific Cascade Middle School with their waste station sign.*

During the 2022-2023 school year, the Green Schools Program helped K-12 schools and school districts to initiate or improve conservation practices and to engage students and staff in reducing waste, recycling, composting, and practicing other conservation strategies in their schools, homes, and communities. In June 2023, the program recognized 67 schools, nearly double the number recognized in June 2022, two school districts, and 88 student teams for their Green School activities and successes.

Additionally, the program hosted an Organics Management Law informational meeting for school

districts in March 2023, with 23 attendees and 11 districts represented.

The Green Schools Program provided 339 schools with information, recommendations, and resources, such as recycling and composting bins and signs needed to start or expand recycling practices. Program participants were spread throughout 17 school districts, 35 cities, and unincorporated areas. As of December 2023, 86 percent of public K-12 schools had received program assistance, and 85.6 percent of participating schools had received program recognition.

## Green Building Program provides tools for sustainable development

The Green Building Program helps to provide resources to builders to reduce the environmental impacts of construction, demolition, renovation, and maintenance of buildings in King County. The 2022 Strategic Climate Action Plan report, which was finalized and published in December of 2023, reported that the County’s GreenTools program reviewed 442 King County-owned capital projects that submitted annual green building reports. Eighty-nine percent of 62 completed capital projects achieved Platinum rating level in green building with an average of 80.25 percent construction and demolition waste diversion rate, resulting in 133,740 tons diverted from landfills.

Another Green Building program, the Regional Code Collaboration (RCC), developed codes associated with construction and demolition (C&D) material management, deconstruction, expanded use of salvaged lumber, and electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. SWD employees participated in the Washington State Building Code Council amendment process and were successful in getting approval for the inclusion of these requirements in the 2021 Building and Residential Codes which will be applicable to all development across Washington state in March of 2024.

### Repair events lend a hand

Continuing to serve as a model for repair programs around the Northwest, the King County free community repair events program held seven events in 2023, in Bellevue, Burien (2), Issaquah, Kent, Renton, and SeaTac. At these waste reduction and resource conservation events, skilled “fixers” and seamsters from a variety of communities and cultures work together, seeking to repair and mend the public’s small household and personal items. With partners such as the Bellevue-based Chinese American families’ organization Little Masters Club, a growing element of this program is to help young people learn repair skills, working with their “fixer” parents. Since its inception in 2016, this program has held a total of 81 repair events, in 26 different King County cities and communities outside of Seattle. More than 3,400 items have been worked on, and most have been fixed or helpfully diagnosed.



*King County residents bring household and personal items to regular repair events.*

### Construction and demolition program focuses on community education

One in three truckloads of solid waste generated in King County consists of construction and demolition (C&D) debris. King County requires that readily recyclable C&D materials (metal, cardboard, wood, concrete, asphalt paving, brick, and new drywall scrap) be recycled, which furthers the Division’s zero waste of resources goal and carbon emissions reduction efforts.



*This Bellevue hotel is an example of conventional demolition that using heavy equipment.*

The Division’s C&D management program is funded by a \$4.25 per ton fee. The fee applies only to C&D waste that is landfilled, further incentivizing recycling. This fee has been unchanged since 1993. The collected fees go into a dedicated fund that covers expenses related to C&D management and programmatic functions.

Approximately 220,000 tons of C&D waste was landfilled by companies participating in the King County designated C&D facilities program in 2023 generating \$935,000 in revenues. Due to a delay in reporting by Ecology, the most recent year’s C&D recycling data for King County is not yet available. The Solid Waste Division continued working with King County cities to support the adoption of the Washington State Building Code appendices that address reuse and recycling of building materials,

exterior structure lead removal, deconstruction, and C&D reporting. This is a joint effort with the Communitywide Green Building Program to advance Green Codes.

The C&D program worked on several projects in 2023 to raise awareness and provide educational resources to improve recycling of C&D materials. In February, the Division hosted a virtual Salvaged Lumber Summit focused on better addressing climate change and creating a circular economy for wood with more than 170 participants from 11 countries, 24 states and provinces, and nine King County cities. The program also hosted its first workforce development training with a focus on deconstruction, in coordination with Seattle Public Utilities, offered to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, and other community-based organizations.

The Division hosted a three-week deconstruction training course, which included one week of textbook and computer education, and two weeks of hands-on tutorials in the field, using a King County-owned building as an example. Two follow up trainings were offered, consisting of an Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-course program along with a King County application clinic in collaboration with the County's Green Jobs Program. The C&D Program plans to offer and expand this training in 2024 to meet the demand and interest from the community.

## Designated recyclable in King County

As specified in the *Final 2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan*, King County's list of designated recyclables is defined and updated by Ecology's annual statewide survey of materials that have been recycled in Washington. Designated recyclables in King County include:

- Carpet and pads
- Clean wood
- Construction and demolition debris
- Electronics
- Furniture
- Glass
- Metal
- Moderate risk waste (all-purpose cleaners, batteries, pesticides, used motor oil)
- Organics
- Other materials (latex paint, toner and ink cartridges, photographic film, tires)
- Paper
- Plastic
- Textiles
- Gypsum



## Transfer Stations

Providing customers with safe, efficient, and responsible waste disposal and transfer is a key service of the Solid Waste Division. In 2023, the Division continued its work to modernize its transfer system.

### Division continues updating the transfer system in south and northeast King County

In 2023, the Division made progress on the South County Recycling and Transfer Station Project to replace the aging Algona Transfer Station by 2026. The Division also continued the siting process for the Northeast County Recycling and Transfer Station Project to replace the 60-year-old Houghton Transfer Station in Kirkland by 2029. Both facilities will be designed to meet modern green building standards and offer better access to improved waste disposal and comprehensive recycling services.



*A birds-eye view of Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station*



*Groundbreaking at the new South County Recycling and Transfer Station.*

### South County Recycling and Transfer Station construction begins

King County broke ground on the new South County Recycling and Transfer Station in May of 2023. The \$200 million investment will help advance the County's Re+ goals by increasing access to recycling and other services not currently available at the Algona Transfer Station. These features include convenient hazardous waste disposal for households and qualifying businesses, green building features, and improvements to nearby wetlands and waterways, as well as public art and other community benefits.

Early construction activities that occurred last year included site preparation, excavation, grading, and tree removal. King County will keep the existing Algona Transfer Station open throughout construction of the new facility, which is scheduled to open in 2026.

## Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station moves into environmental review

The Solid Waste Division also continued its effort to engage the public in finding a site for the planned Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project. The Division completed scoping meetings and several briefings to community groups regarding the environmental impact statement (EIS). Early this year, the Division will analyze two potential station locations as part of the EIS process. The new station is expected to be operational in 2029. The new station will replace the aging Houghton Recycling and Transfer Station. It will provide convenient, accessible recycling services for a variety of items and materials and will be fully enclosed to control noise and odors. The community will continue to have opportunities to help shape decisions on station design, amenities, and services.



*The Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station will replace the current Houghton Transfer Station.*

## More than 1.7 million pounds of hazardous waste safely collected



*Staff sorting mercury-containing bulbs at the Factoria hazardous waste drop-off.*

Properly disposing of hazardous products that contain toxic, corrosive, flammable, or reactive ingredients can be challenging. The Haz Waste Program provides convenient hazardous waste collection services – in addition to prevention and education resources – for residents and businesses in King County.

The Haz Waste Program makes it easy to dispose of many types of hazardous materials, such as cleaning products, motor oil, and pesticides. In 2023, the two modes of Wastemobile services – the roving and Auburn Wastemobiles – served over 19,000 residents and organizations for safe and proper disposal of their hazardous waste. The Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station also helped just over 19,000 residents, businesses and organizations to safely dispose of their hazardous waste. More than 1.7 million pounds of hazardous materials were safely disposed of in 2023, protecting both the environment and public health.

## Meet the Goats! King County rolls out new electric yard goats at its transfer stations



*Electric yard truck at the Shoreline Recycling and Transfer Station.*

The Division is continuing the important work to increase the sustainability of its operations over the past year. One of the most significant achievements was the introduction of electric yard trucks, also called yard goats, at the Bow Lake and Shoreline recycling and transfer stations. These trucks are used to move freight containers at the transfer stations and are usually powered by diesel. In addition to improving sustainability, the electric trucks help reduce air pollution for transfer station employees and customers. The yard goats at the Shoreline Recycling and Transfer Station were paid for in part by federal and state funding from the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, Ecology, and The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The County is continuing its electrification process with 12 new electric yard goats planned for the Houghton, Factoria, Renton, Enumclaw, and Vashon transfer stations by the end of 2024. It is estimated that each electric yard goat will save about 9.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents in emissions per year.

## Cedar Hills Regional Landfill



*A tipper at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill.*

The Cedar Hills Regional Landfill has been in operation since the 1960s and is the last operating landfill in King County. Every day, more than 100 trucks deliver tons of garbage to the landfill for final disposal. The newly opened Area 8 is the current active area of the landfill, with the rest of the 920 acres devoted to administrative facilities and reclaimed landfill areas. An onsite gas-processing facility, operated by Bio Energy Washington (BEW), collects and purifies landfill gas so it can be sold as a renewable energy source. The system can produce enough natural gas each year to meet the needs of up to 36,000 homes in King County or to substitute for the energy use of 11.2 million gallons of diesel fuel. In the summer of 2023, BEW ceased accepting and processing the County's landfill gas. The County attempted to reach a resolution with BEW, but BEW remains shut down as of the date of this report. To date, settlement efforts have not been successful, and litigation continues into 2024.

### **Landfill disposal amounts decline slightly**

In 2023, 835,233 tons of garbage were disposed of at the landfill, representing a three percent decrease, compared to 2022. During 2023, about 82 percent (681,302 tons) of waste tonnage came from franchised commercial hauling companies, with self-haul tonnage accounting for the remaining 18 percent (151,720 tons). Regional Direct tonnage (residuals from the recycling centers) dropped by about 12,000 tons, a 76 percent decrease.

The Bow Lake Recycling and Transfer Station continues to be the busiest facility, with 258,037 tons disposed there, followed by the Factoria Transfer Station (143,419 tons), the Algona Transfer Station (142,443 tons), and the Houghton Recycling and Transfer Station (124,468 tons).

### Long-term planning for waste disposal and maximizing landfill capacity

The existing landfill cell (Area 8) is expected to reach capacity in 2026. The Division advanced plans to extend the life of the landfill for an additional 10 years beyond 2028, as outlined in the final 2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan (Comp Plan).<sup>2</sup> These plans include relocating support facilities, such as office spaces and maintenance buildings currently located at the landfill, to build more disposal capacity at the Cedar Hills site.



*Trash being compacted at the active area of the Cedar Hills Landfill.*

A final EIS that considered public comments on the draft proposal was published in March 2020. In the EIS, the Division identified its preferred alternative to permanently relocate support facilities to the southeast corner of the landfill property. In November 2020, Division leadership identified its preferred alternative for landfill development, which entails:

- No additional landfilling in the Main Hill and Southeast Pit areas
- Landfilling in the southern portion of Areas 2/3, 4, and the Central Pit up to 788 feet
- Landfilling in Areas 5 and 6 up to 788 feet
- No additional landfilling in Area 7, which is currently at 788 feet
- Landfilling in Area 8 to no more than 830 feet
- New Area 9 development in the southeast area and landfilling to no more than 830 feet
- Pursue a Special Use Permit to place the new support facilities within the existing southern buffer zone.

The move provides a long planning runway for the next disposal options after the landfill closes. Landfilling is currently the most cost-effective option with the fewest environmental impacts and offers a reliable local disposal option that does not require rail export.

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<sup>2</sup> [Final 2019 Solid Waste Comprehensive Plan](#)

## Equity and Social Justice

Following the lead of Executive Dow Constantine, the Division is committed to advancing equity and social justice (ESJ) for both its employees and customers.

### Cleanup LIFT continues to make services more equitable

To make services more equitable for customers and to advance ESJ goals in King County, the Division implemented a low-income discount program called Cleanup LIFT – a discounted disposal fee of \$15 for lower-income customers who bring their garbage and recycling materials to a King County disposal facility. The program had 18,110 transactions in 2023, which saved customers a little over \$270,000 and provided financial relief to the Division’s most financially vulnerable customers. That accounts for about a one percent increase in use of the program compared to 2022.



### Creating a more equitable work environment

In 2023, the Division continued its ESJ work both internally and in the communities it serves. This year, the Division hired a new Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Manager who manages and works with the Division’s two ESJ Program Managers. Together, they will continue to build and strengthen trust and relationships with SWD employees and frontline communities in King County to ensure outcomes outlined in the County’s ESJ plans and policies are met.

### Closing the Gap begins to build a roadmap for a more inclusive workplace

Closing the Gap is an employee-led, cross-functional team effort focused on creating a more inclusive workplace for non-supervisory employees, who reported feeling less connected and valued than leadership-level colleagues in the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey. The goal of the work is to build a roadmap for improving communication, engagement and belonging among non-supervisory staff, and identify ways to increase trust between the Solid Waste Division Management Team (SWDMT) and other employees. This important work was launched in 2023 and will continue in 2024.

### Incorporating Equity and Social Justice into capital projects

To ensure capital projects are bid, designed, constructed, and operated equitably, the Division has developed an Equity Impact Review for all capital projects and programs.<sup>3</sup> The review process identifies the potential benefits and impacts of a project and what community outreach is needed to better understand and mitigate those impacts. Four Equity Impact Reviews were conducted in 2023, with more in the development process.

SWD has also developed an ESJ Management Plan that closely follows the ESJ Sustainability Scorecard. This is a rating system for sustainability of capital projects, with equity included as a key consideration. SWD also conducts demographic analyses as part of the ESJ Management Plan and Equity Impact Review processes. These analyses consider race, income, multilingual access, and several other factors in the area impacted by a project. This helps the Division understand how communities are impacted by a project, and how best to reach them.

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<sup>3</sup> [King County Equity Impact Review process](#)

Equity reviews can result in actions to mitigate negative impacts of projects and programs, and identify possibilities to partner, inform, provide economic opportunities, and possibly co-create with communities. Examples of project-related ESJ actions include job training and apprenticeships, community-led restoration projects, improvements to nearby hiking and biking trails, and amenities, such as public meeting space for county-related activities.

### **Disposal support for County residents**

The Disposal Assistance Voucher Program enables environmental site inspectors from county agencies and cities to request vouchers that can be used to subsidize limited disposal costs for residents who are either victims of illegal dumping or on a limited income. Site inspectors must be trained to access the program. In 2023, 20 site inspectors accessed vouchers on behalf of 78 residents, and 24 additional site inspectors were trained to provide the service. This service provides valuable assistance to individuals who, through no fault of their own, would have to bear full costs to dispose of illegally dumped waste, or those that may otherwise struggle to pay for some or all disposal costs.

### **Junk Vehicle Affidavit Service assists residents to clean up property**

Junk Vehicle Affidavit Service is a free service that allows private property owners without title for vehicles or vessels to complete the necessary steps to be able to dispose or recycle them. Vehicles must meet the Department of Licensing's criteria for junk and be located on private property to qualify for a junk vehicle affidavit issued by Division staff. Each vehicle requires a documented inspection by an inspector certified by the Washington State Patrol. In 2023, the Division inspected 760 vehicles and vessels across the County, in city jurisdictions and unincorporated areas, and issued 718 junk vehicle affidavits. This service assists property owners to protect the environment and discourages illegal dumping.

## Planning

The Solid Waste Division works with its 37 partnering cities, the Metropolitan Solid Waste Advisory Committee (MSWAC) and the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), the King County Council, and other stakeholders to ensure it is delivering value and the utmost in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.<sup>4</sup>

### New solid waste disposal rate supports essential services, invests in environmental goals



*Hauler stopping at the Shoreline Transfer Station scalehouse.*

The Division enacted an increase of 9.6 percent, or 90 cents per month, to residential curbside collection bills in January 2024. The rate reflects cost-saving measures to reduce operating expenditures and increases the discount rate for low-income customers, while supporting vital disposal and recycling programs, expanding services and modernizing facilities, and advancing climate goals.

New minimum disposal fees will change from \$26.98 per vehicle to \$29.63 per vehicle, and from \$168.68 per ton to \$185.28 per ton for self-haul customers. The per ton rate for commercial (contract) haulers will drop from \$154.02 to \$150.83

with the implementation of the fixed-annual charge (FAC). The commercial hauler rate dropped this year because of this new fee. The FAC is a new part of the SWD rate structure intended to help stabilize revenues and rates as tonnage – the largest source of revenue for the division – decreases due to diversion efforts by essentially converting part of the per-ton, tip fee (variable revenue source) to a fixed fee (fixed source). The FAC is shared out to cities and unincorporated areas based on the share of tons each city/area contributes to total tons. For 2024, the first year this new fee is implemented, the FAC is set at \$22,614,181.

Increased discounts for qualifying low-income customers through the Cleanup LIFT program will also coincide with the change, rising from \$15 to \$16 per transaction. Yard and wood waste fees will remain flat from the 2023 rates at a minimum of \$18 per vehicle and \$115 per ton. The mattress handling fee of \$30 per item will also stay the same and covers the cost associated with disposal or recycling of these large, bulky items.

Revenue from the 2024 rate will allow SWD to continue essential services while supporting capital projects and programs crucial to environmental progress on climate change mitigation, recycling, and waste reduction efforts.

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<sup>4</sup> [Solid waste advisory committees](#)

## Division launches Re+



King County has formally committed to reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions from its solid waste system through the 2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan, Strategic Climate Action Plan, and King County Code.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, the Comp Plan defines King County's goal to keep the 70 percent of materials with economic value out of the landfill. Re+ is the Division's approach to achieving these goals and represents a major shift away from the 20th century approach to solid waste management and towards prioritizing waste reduction and prevention, recycling, and reuse. Re+ also prioritizes bringing together diverse communities to create a more equitable waste-free King County.

In 2023, the Division made progress on Re+ goals. In February, the Division formally launched Re+, finalized the Re+ strategic plan, and hosted a media event to inform the public about zero waste goals.<sup>6</sup> The Division also advanced Re+ actions, including continuing regular coordination with the Re+ Community Panel – a group of representatives from frontline communities that provides insight and direction around the intersection of equity and solid waste policies – conducting resident outreach on single-family organics collection, and investigating and piloting new waste reduction technologies.<sup>7</sup> The Division will continue to implement Re+ actions in the coming years.

## Re+ Grants support zero waste innovations



*An artisan from Re+ grant recipient, Refugee Artisan Initiative.*

As part of Re+, the Division continued to provide grant and businesses development programs to support businesses, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and city partners to build and implement projects that expand waste reduction, reuse, and recycling.

The Division concluded the first cycle of the Re+ Circular Economy Grants in 2023, a competitive grant program that awarded \$2.3 million to 14 innovative waste prevention and

recycling projects. The Division also launched the Re+ City Grant, a competitive grant program to support cities in delivering projects that create a more circular economy, at the end of the year. Twelve cities, delivering on five projects, were awarded approximately \$390,000.

King County also supported the NextCycle Washington program, which completed its first year of operation in 2023.<sup>8</sup> The statewide program provides two types of support for projects working to expand waste prevention, repair, reuse, recycling and composting.

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<sup>5</sup> [King County Strategic Climate Action Plan](#) and [King County Code Title 10 \(Solid Waste\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Re+ Strategic Plan](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Re+ Community Panel Overview](#)

<sup>8</sup> [NextCycle Washington](#)

- The Circular Accelerator program offers mentorship, networking, technical assistance, and pitch development for circular businesses and projects, helping them identify potential partnerships and funding opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Fifteen teams participated in the inaugural cohort. The program culminated in a pitch showcase where teams presented their projects, competing for cash prizes. Three winning teams were collectively awarded \$26,000 to support their ongoing work.
- Renew Seed Grants provides mini-grants of up to \$10,000 to businesses, community-based organizations, Tribal governments, and research institutions for circular projects.<sup>10</sup> The program awarded over \$400,000 to 40 projects in its first year.

### Juno pilot: investigating new resource recovery technologies



*The Juno mixed waste processing facility.*

As part of the Re+ goal of recovering more resources from the waste stream, the Division is investigating a new set of technologies, called mixed waste processing, that can capture and divert recyclable material from garbage before it goes to the Cedar Hills landfill. Mixed waste processing facilities can act as a last screen for garbage, working in tandem with municipal recycling and composting programs to divert resources.

Last spring, the County partnered with Georgia-Pacific to evaluate its mixed waste processing facility, called Juno. During the three-month pilot project, King County shipped about 750 tons of municipal solid waste from the Renton Recycling and Transfer Station to the Juno facility in Toledo, Oregon. The purpose of the project was to test how much recyclable material could be recovered from garbage that would typically go to the landfill. Based on preliminary findings, the pilot resulted in an average diversion rate of up to 50 percent, meaning nearly half of the material that would have gone to the landfill was recovered, mostly as recyclable paper fiber, metal, and non-potable water for industrial uses. King County is working with Georgia-Pacific for a full analysis of the pilot, including understanding energy and water use and identifying potential steps to improve the diversion rate.

### Single-family organics public outreach

Focusing on greenhouse gas and waste reduction, the Division is exploring ways to divert organic materials, such as food and yard waste, generated from single-family households. In 2023, the Division reached out to the public to get feedback on potential county diversion policies. An online survey was promoted on King County and partner social media as well as through online ads in both English and Spanish. SWD received over 3,200 responses from across the county. Focus groups were held with participants identifying as low-income, BIPOC, rural residents, or residents from areas with the lowest diversion rates. Public engagement concluded with an open meeting to review results and provide

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<sup>9</sup> [NextCycle Circular Accelerator](#)

<sup>10</sup> [NextCycle Renew Seed Grants](#)

another feedback opportunity. Public input will help guide single-family collection policy exploration with SWD partners into 2024 and beyond.

## Re+ enhances City/County collaboration

Increasing collaboration between King County and partner cities is another key part of reaching Re+ goals. By collaborating and partnering, SWD can learn from and build on the individual waste reduction efforts of each city. The Re+ Pledge was developed in late 2022 to help formalize the commitment between King County and its partner cities to better align recycling and waste services. In less than a year, 25 cities have signed on to the Re+ Pledge, committing to a shared vision to work together to make Re+ a reality.



*City staff and officials pose with King County Executive Dow Constantine at the Re+ City Pledge Event.*

In October, King County celebrated the efforts of city partners, and County employees, while highlighting the 25 cities that have signed the Re+ Pledge. At the event, which included remarks from King County Executive Dow Constantine, and Solid Waste Division Director, Pat McLaughlin, each signatory city received a Re+ recognition plaque and signed a ceremonial Re+ pledge board. Five cities also presented on their waste reduction accomplishments.

The County is continuing to prioritize City/County Collaboration as a key Re+ action, with the goal of getting all 37 cities in the regional system to commit to Re+ waste reduction goals.

## Regional debris management plan

In early 2023, SWD initiated the development of the King County Debris Management Base Plan and has since been collaborating with regional partners to ensure a comprehensive, accurate, and functional regional plan. This plan provides guidance to prepare for and respond to a disaster debris-causing incident, with the goal of preventing health problems, protecting lives and property, and reducing environmental harm. The plan describes how the County, and its regional partners will collect debris, sort it, and transfer it to its final disposition location. A regional approach to planning is critical for a coordinated response and to manage the multi-jurisdictional impacts of emergencies in King County. In addition to the base plan, cities, Tribes, and special purpose districts within King County are expected to develop their own debris management plan annexes using the template provided by SWD. These annexes will support specific jurisdictions during smaller scale incidents that might not warrant the need to activate the regional base plan.

Debris management planning conserves disposal capacity. Counties with plans remove more cubic yards and recycle 47 percent of their total debris, which is significant when every 1 million cubic yards of debris lessens the lifespan of a landfill by five years. The final King County Debris Management Base Plan is expected to be completed mid-2024.

### **Comprehensive plan update addresses long-term disposal**

In 2023, the Division began work to update the Comp Plan with its solid waste advisory committees, MSWAC and SWAC. Updates are being made to the chapters on sustainable materials management, landfill management, solid waste system financing, solid waste disposal, and the County's next disposal system after Cedar Hills Regional Landfill closes. Consulting firm Tetra Tech was hired in 2023 to analyze and compare various long-term disposal options for how to dispose of waste after Cedar Hills Regional Landfill closes. The options being studied are waste export, waste to energy (mass burn), gasification, pyrolysis, and refuse-derived fuel. The final study report is expected to be completed mid-2024.

### **Solid waste rate restructure supports financial sustainability**

The rates charged by SWD are an investment in programs to reduce waste, increase recycling, and continue to responsibly and cost-effectively manage garbage disposal for 37 partner cities and 1.5 million people daily.

The Division currently derives about 90 percent of its revenue from the basic fee to dispose of garbage at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill at a time when it is striving to implement Re+ to increase waste prevention and diversion, and increase efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as called for in County policy directives. As SWD advances toward its Re+ goals, garbage tonnage will decrease significantly. This means that, as recycling rates increase, the Division's revenue will decline, which is an unsustainable business model.

In March 2022, King County Council passed a new rate structure that included a fixed annual charge to commercial waste haulers to provide a stable revenue source independent of how much waste tonnage is brought in. The new rate structure with the fixed annual charge was implemented in January of 2024. Previously, SWD worked with three pilot cities (Redmond, Kent, and Maple Valley) and the three major haulers to develop template language for contracts in preparation for the rate restructure. This work will help provide guidance to smaller cities updating their hauler contracts.

## 2024 Outlook

Looking ahead to 2024, the Solid Waste Division will continue to strive for excellence in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.

### 2025 rate proposal to support Division goals

The Division is currently working with its advisory committees, MSWAC and SWAC, and the King County Executive Office to develop a rate proposal for 2025. This rate proposal will continue to support current services and make progress on Division goals, such as Re+ and carbon neutrality, and Comp Plan commitments, such as building the South County Recycling and Transfer Station, siting and constructing the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station, and expanding the life of the landfill. It will also support increased recycling activity at the busiest transfer stations, provide employees to satisfy increased regulatory requirements at the landfill, better management of flow control, and improve employee retention.

### Comprehensive plan continues to make progress

The process to determine SWD's next Long-Term Disposal method is set to wrap up in 2024, with the consultant study expected to be completed in mid-2024 and the final decision made with assistance from MSWAC, SWAC, DNRP, and the Executive in the fourth quarter of 2024.

### Capital projects move forward



*Rendering of the future South County Recycling and Transfer Station.*

In 2024, the Division will continue work in the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill Site Development Plan and Relocation Project and pursue a Special Use Permit to place the new facilities within the existing southern buffer zone. If approved, buildings and main landfill support facilities, including but not limited to truck maintenance facilities, office space, truck wash, some tractor and trailer parking, employee parking, and equipment calibration rooms, will be relocated. Excavation for Area 9 Stage 1 is also scheduled to begin in 2024 with Stage 2 follows in 2025.

The Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station project team will evaluate the potential environmental and community impacts to two potential sites and one no-action alternative. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement is set for publication in the first quarter of 2024.

The South County Recycling and Transfer Station project continues to make progress in construction with substantial completion expected in 2026.

**KING COUNTY SOLID WASTE DIVISION**  
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Natural Resources and Parks  
**Solid Waste Division**

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