

Unity Area Regional Recycling Center

Brooks, Dixmont, Freedom, Jackson, Knox, Montville, Thorndike, Troy, Unity
95 Leonard Road, Thorndike, ME 04968

Universal Waste Q&A

Q: What is the difference between Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) & Universal Waste (UW)?

A: HHW is basically any waste generated by a household that can create health or environmental hazards. It is an umbrella term covering a wide range of items such as: old paint, , gas, pesticides, etc... UW is a small list of mercury containing products that are part of the HHW group; fluorescent lights, mercury thermometers, some batteries, TV's and computer monitors.

Q: What is the law concerning Universal Wastes?

A: It is now against the law to put mercury containing products (UW) into the trash. The law states that "as of January 2005 all mercury added Universal Wastes will not be disposed of along with the municipal solid waste and must be recycled." In July 2006 "the disposal of TV's and computer monitors will be prohibited in Maine and therefore may not be disposed of with the municipal solid waste and must be recycled". These new laws hang on the already existing law that states that Maine municipalities are responsible for providing solid waste disposal for their residents. (Title 38, Ch.13, Sec.1305.1)

Q: What is the penalty for violating the law?

A: The violating municipality and the DEP would work out a consent agreement but towns could be fined from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per day that the violation continues unresolved.

Q: Who will enforce the law and how will they do it?

A: Each town has an assigned DEP site manager who will be actively enforcing the law. Enforcement will be done by inspection of transfer stations or direct contact with officials for towns with curbside pickup.

Q: What are the chances of being caught if we violate or ignore this law?

A: Very high. The DEP will be actively enforcing UW recycling at landfills and incinerators (like PERC, where much of our municipal solid waste goes) as well as at the municipal level.

Q: What are some of our options for dealing with this new law?

A: #1-Build and operate a Universal Waste Facility at UARRC in Thorndike. State grant money (approximately \$10,000) would pay for most of the construction (estimated construction cost is \$10,000-\$18,000). Building costs that exceed the available grant money would be paid for from UARRC's capital improvement fund. If all nine member towns that own and operate UARRC agree to fund the operation of the UW Facility, the manager and board of directors of UARRC estimate that the operation of the UW Facility would cost each town about \$3 per resident per year. The warrants in the town articles seek approval for funding the operation of such a facility. This option would provide residents with a convenient and relatively inexpensive way to dispose of UW and assist town officials with their obligations to uphold and enforce state laws. The UARRC board recommends this option.

#2- Build a UW Facility with the combination of state grant money and UARRC capital improvement funds described above. If all nine UARRC member towns do not approve warrants to fund the operation of the UW Facility then residents would be charged user fees for each item dropped off. Towns could choose to pay the fees for their residents to ensure that UW items are properly disposed of and to ensure that they are not at risk of being fined.

#3- Do not build a UW Facility; continue with some towns holding one-day collections that are inconvenient for residents, can be costly to the towns, and do not provide a long-term solution.

Q: Why should towns pay for the operation of a Universal Waste Facility?

A: If a regular and convenient disposal option for UW is not readily available for residents it is very likely that these items WILL end up in our trash, or in the woods, or along the roads. The town would then be in violation of the law and at risk of fines from DEP, or more likely, at risk of rejection of its municipal

Q: What items would be accepted at the Universal Waste Facility?

A: Any item defined as Universal Waste; florescent light bulbs, TV's, computers, mercury added products (thermometers, mercury switches, rechargeable batteries), non leaking PCB containing light ballasts, other lamps that contain lead or mercury: HID, neon, mercury vapor, Sodium, and metal halide bulbs.

Q: What can residents do with HHW items that are not UW like pesticides, waste oil, oil-based paint?

A: Unlike UW, these items have been illegal to dispose of in solid waste since 1984 and have been managed on a voluntary basis by business', industry, and HHW one day collection events. They are not included in the Universal waste law. To continue to manage UW along with these items is very expensive. Managing UW at a central site is the most cost effective method for disposing of the new UW; one day events are the most expensive option for towns to manage their UW. [Funding for the reimbursement for the Waldo county HHW day has been used up and will not be available in 2006.]

Q: How long will the state grant money be available for a building?

A: Grant money will be available for a very short time (used by June 30th 06) as a unique one-time opportunity for our towns. UARRC is at the top of the list to receive this money should we decide to go forward with a building. This grant money is NON-matching and could be as much as \$10,000.

Q: What if only some of the UARRC member towns decide to fund the operation of this new facility?

A: The UARRC Board of Directors could, with instruction from the towns they represent, decide to build the facility IF a majority of the UARRC member towns want a UW collection facility.

Q: Why is a separate structure necessary for the collection of Universal Wastes?

A: Universal wastes are hazardous and toxic, and as such the DEP has set up handling and storage requirements to minimize exposure and risk to people and the environment. Some of these requirements are that UW needs to be isolated, secure, and in a ventilated area with impervious surfaces. UARRC does not have the extra warehouse space available to separate and store UW in its existing building.

Q: Why not just buy something cheap like a truck body?

A: Because of the structural requirements of electrification, active ventilation, and the space needed to store enough items to meet vendor pickup requirements, a trailer is not adequate.

Q: How are other towns and cities dealing with these new laws and rules?

A: Larger cities are either hosting temporary one-day collection events, or building their own structures. Most small communities are joining regional efforts, such as Sandy River Regional Recycling, or Tri Community Landfill, in order to lessen the cost of UW collection and to avoid the burden of managing their own facilities and staff.

Q: How will the UW collected at the new facility be disposed of?

A: UARRC will hire and pay state approved vendors to collect the materials. The state has established rules that require vendors to responsibly track and recycle all the materials they collect in the state of Maine. The DEP monitors every shipment. Effective January 2006 manufacturers are required by law to pay for the recycling of CRTs (TVs and computer monitors). Manufacturers will also pay for thermostats, rechargeable batteries, and some mercury switches.

Q: Are there markets for UW items like there are for other recyclables?

A: No. These materials will always cost money to dispose of and recycle.

More questions? Please contact your town's representative to the UARRC board of directors, Ross Nason, the UARRC manager, 568-3117; Anne Pistell at the Maine DEP, 287-7703; or Sam Morris at the State Planning Office, 287-8054.