

Revising Seattle's
Solid Waste Plan

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The Disposable Heroes series, 2005

Various plastics

22 x 10 x 17 inches

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Chapter I REVISING SEATTLE'S SOLID WASTE PLAN

Seattle has been an international leader in solid waste management for decades. This has not been an accident. Much credit for the city's pacesetter role belongs to our public support for new and environmentally progressive solid waste programs. Consistent, thorough planning has also helped. This 2011 Plan Revision represents another step in the evolution of Seattle's solid waste system.

I.1 WHAT'S BEING REVISED

This Plan revises Seattle's 1998 Solid Waste Plan, *On the Path to Sustainability*, as amended in 2004. The overall planning direction remains the same. However, this update presents an opportunity to step back and take a deep look at our system and possibilities for the future.

We are also taking advantage of this opportunity to create a very different document. In addition to meeting the legal requirement for a solid waste plan, this Plan will serve as a comprehensive resource document for our customers and other parties.

I.2 PLANNING HISTORY OVERVIEW

The State of Washington's 1969 legislation RCW 70.95 set the requirement for local solid waste plans. Seattle operated under the aegis of King County's 1974 and 1982 solid waste management plans until 1989. Seattle's first solid waste plan was the 1989 Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan, *On the Road to Recovery*.

In 1987, Seattle faced a crisis with its waste management system. The last two landfills, closed in 1983 and 1986, had become Superfund sites that would cost more than \$90 million to make environmentally safe. We began hauling our garbage to the King County landfill, which radically raised its tip fees. By 1987, solid waste customer rates had increased by 82%. Seattle thought there must be a less expensive option, and set out to find it.

The Solid Waste Utility (now part of Seattle Public Utilities) considered incinerating city garbage. Citizens immediately and overwhelmingly expressed their opposition. No one wanted an incinerator in the neighborhood, and many were concerned about air pollution and final disposal of the ash. SPU responded to citizen concerns, and used the crisis as an opportunity to launch waste reduction and recycling programs that had never been attempted on so large a scale.

In 1998, Seattle prepared its second Solid Waste Management Plan, *On the Path to Sustainability*. That plan was updated by a 2004 Plan Amendment that the Washington State Department of Ecology approved in 2005.

In 2007, SPU and the Seattle City Council jointly conducted the Seattle Solid Waste Recycling, Waste Reduction, and Facilities Opportunities (Zero Waste) study. This study examined whether there were still other methods Seattle might use to reduce the amount of its solid waste and divert more from landfill disposal.

Following the 2007 study, the Mayor and City Council adopted Resolution 30990, the *Zero Waste Resolution*. The resolution re-committed the city to its 60% recycling goal for the year 2012. It also set a longer-term goal of 70% recycling by the year 2025, and outlined some additional actions and strategies for achieving these goals.

1.3 PLANNING PROCESS: CONTINUING THE VISION AND GOALS

The planning process for this revision involved regrouping around the vision and goals of prior planning. In writing this Plan, we are incorporating changes in the regulatory environment, involving key stakeholders, and developing a process for future Plan updates.

Seattle's 1998 Plan incorporated the key concepts of zero waste, waste prevention, sustainability, and product stewardship that continue to drive the contemporary approach to solid waste management.

1998 Plan Vision: Zero Waste

- Increase waste reduction and resource conservation
- Recycle 60% by 2008
- Increase the efficiency, fairness, convenience, and accessibility of services
- Expand local markets and increase purchases of recycled-content products
- Increase consumer and producer responsibility for sustainable waste management practices
- Implement the Seattle Sustainable Building Action Plan
- Improve sustainable waste management and resource conservation practices in City of Seattle operations
- Keep Seattle's neighborhoods clean and safe by partnering with communities

The 2004 Plan Amendment renewed the 1998 vision with these enhancements:

- In 2010, there is an even more streamlined solid waste system, with integrated residential and commercial contracts and services, state-of-the-art transfer and processing facilities, and minimum transport and handling.
- More local markets are available, including infrastructure for processing food waste and construction debris.
- Garbage generation is declining. Both residents and businesses recycle aggressively. Builders, manufacturers, and retailers play a major role in sustainable design and product take-back.
- Organic composting has helped restore Seattle's soils and watersheds. The city's internal waste reduction, recycling, and buy-recycled programs are exemplary.
- By 2025, there has been a radical shift in how we think about waste. Most products are designed to be readily reused or recycled, and all costs incorporated into the price of the product. Garbage disposal is obsolete. Consumers, producers, and utilities provide the most efficient infrastructure for managing different products and materials.

This 2011 Plan revision continues the trend toward a model of resource management and consideration of life-cycle costs and benefits. It aligns with the vision, key principles, and strategies in Washington State's *Beyond Waste Plan* 2009 update.

The Plan further recognizes environmentally responsible solid waste management as a cornerstone strategy in climate protection plans. And its recommendations strive for equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of Seattle's programs.

Washington State Beyond Waste Vision

We can transition to a society where waste is viewed as inefficient, and where most wastes and toxic substances have been eliminated. This will contribute to economic, social and environmental vitality.

1.3.1 REGULATORY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Various state and local regulations, guidelines, and plans influence Seattle's solid waste planning.

State of Washington law RCW 70.95 requires solid waste plans and sets required content. In 2010, the state published *Guidelines for Development of Local Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plans and Plan Revisions*. The state updated its solid waste plan *Beyond Waste* in 2009. Oregon State law regulates Columbia Ridge Landfill, in Arlington, Oregon, to which Seattle sends waste for disposal.

The City of Seattle has numerous ordinances, resolutions and administrative rules governing solid waste management. The 2007 **Seattle City Council Resolution 30990** (the *Zero Waste* Resolution) and city climate protection initiatives have influenced solid waste management in recent years. Seattle establishes its solid waste rules in the city's solid waste code (Seattle Municipal Code [SMC] 21.36, 21.40, and 21.44).

SPU's 2009-2014 **Strategic Business Plan** sets the priorities of the utility over 6 years. It includes updated mission and vision statements for SPU and describes the desired outcomes for our customers, and internal strategies we will put in place to achieve these outcomes. SPU actively supports the **Race and Social Justice Initiative** as part of the citywide effort to ensure that services are provided in an equitable manner to all citizens.

The City of Seattle **Department of Planning and Development** issues land use and building permits to solid waste facilities consistent with local regulations, just as they do with any development.

The **City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan**, a collection of city-adopted goals and policies about how the city will accommodate growth over the next 20 years, incorporates planned needs for utilities, including solid waste facilities. The city has also developed **emergency plans** that include provisions for managing excess debris from an extraordinary event.

Public Health – Seattle & King County regulates solid waste handling facilities in Seattle and King County. Public Health, Seattle, King County, and the Suburban Cities Association jointly manage moderate risk waste (MRW) through the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program.

1.3.2 PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The parties involved in planning this solid waste plan update have certain roles and responsibilities.

Government

- **Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)** has responsibility for creating, executing, funding all City of Seattle solid waste programs and projects
- **Office of the Mayor** sets direction for all city departments, including SPU
- **Seattle City Council** is the city's legislative body and adopts the Plan by resolution
- **Washington State Department of Ecology** reviews and approves this Plan

Other Stakeholders

- **SPU's Seattle Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC)** provides policy advice and is involved throughout the planning process
- **General Public** includes residents and businesses, solid waste industry representatives, and interest groups. The public's role is played out via the Plan's public involvement process, which includes heightened efforts to reach hard-to-reach populations through innovative means. Appendix C, Public Involvement, gives detail on the public process.

Each of these parties has their own perspective on the Plan. The Plan is meant to serve as a resource for all of them. For example, regulators are interested in ensuring the Plan meets legal requirements. SPU will use the Plan to guide solid waste work in the coming years. And the public is interested in what changes are coming their way.

I.3.3 KEEPING THE PLAN UP TO DATE

SPU will update the Plan at least as often as required by RCW 70.95, currently at least every 5 years. The steps to do so involve assessing whether the update is an *amendment* or a *revision*, as defined by Washington Department of Ecology. **Amendments**, generally, are minor adjustments to the Plan within the 5-year planning window, keeping the plan up to date for permitting and grant purposes. If it has been 5 or more years since the last Plan **revision**, the next update would most likely have to be a revision. Changes in disposal methods or facilities would also trigger a revision.

For Seattle, the **basic every-5-year process** starts about 24 months before the next update is due, with SPU conducting a thorough review of the current Plan's policies, programs and timelines. The review involves highlighting key potential changes. The key potential changes then need evaluating as to whether they'd lead the Plan update to be an amendment or revision. SPU will confer with Ecology before proceeding with either.

The update **process could also be triggered in other ways**. For example, SPU routinely reviews progress via the Annual Recycling Report. In addition to reporting recycling rates, this report describes program actions completed in the year being reported. It also includes the program actions planned for the following year. This is where minor variations from planned programs will be documented. Before the annual report is finalized, the Seattle Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) reviews it and gives comment. The final report goes to the Seattle City Council by July 1, when it is also posted on SPU's website.

If progress tracked through the Annual Recycling Report does not perform as expected, we will figure out what the problems are. The analysis could lead SPU to pursue a policy change that is significantly different from, or not contemplated in, the Plan. In that case, a Plan amendment or revision may be necessary.

In addition to reviewing the Annual Recycling Report, the SWAC discusses solid waste issues throughout the year. A new recommendation from the SWAC could also potentially trigger a Plan amendment or revision. Similarly, new directives from Seattle's elected officials could trigger a change to the Plan. Proposals from the public would be managed through SPU, our elected officials, or the SWAC. SPU is responsible for managing and supporting the discussions and related processes stemming from proposals, whatever the source. SPU ensures SWAC involvement at all stages.

Another possible trigger to launch a Plan update could be an emergency action. This Plan does include post-emergency actions to deal with solid waste and extra debris, as described in section 4.7. However, there is a chance that SPU could take an emergency action that would trigger a Plan update in normal times. SPU will inform the SWAC and other key stakeholders about such actions, as soon as that is feasible. Temporary actions will not require a Plan update. On the other hand, an emergency action could become permanent or could be seen as significant. If so, SPU will coordinate within the city, with the SWAC, and with Ecology as to whether the action triggers a Plan amendment or revision.

SPU will write Plan amendments. Amendments will be adopted after review and comment by the SWAC. SPU will also obtain any needed approvals from Seattle's elected officials as warranted by the changes. Finally, SPU will submit amendments to Ecology within 45 days of adoption.

Chapter I
Revising the Plan

If a Plan revision is the right course of action, SPU will follow the steps outlined in Ecology’s “Guidelines for Development of Local Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plans and Plan Revisions, 2010,” including public involvement. The SWAC will take part at the outset and throughout the revision process.