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NERC PUBLISHES LATEST NORTHEAST GLASS REPORT

Glass

The Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) has released the results of an 11 state survey about the glass recycling markets in the region. The Northeast MRF Glass Survey Report details information about residential glass collected for recycling and prepared for the marketplace by Material Recycling Facilities (MRFs) in the region.

The report provides important insights into the challenges that contribute to the quality and quantity of the region's MRF glass.

The Northeast MRF Glass Survey Report is the result of a project initiated by NERC's Glass Committee, formed in 2017. The committee's goal is to understand the recycled glass value chain and gaps in the Northeast, and to promote greater diversion of glass containers to the highest-value end uses.

The MRF survey results confirmed that the quality of material coming from the facilities as the primary problem with the marketability of the region's residential glass stream. One of the key findings is the end destinations for the glass. Fifty four percent (54 percent) of the glass tonnage reported goes to glass processors; 38 percent to landfills for alternative daily cover, trash, and/or roadbase and fill; 5 percent for aggregate; 3 percent for roadbase aggregate; and less than 1 percent of the tonnage is used for other beneficial use or sent directly to a glass manufacturer.

Additional key findings are that 67 percent of the MRF respondents have not upgraded their facilities in the past 3 years, and 65 percent of the MRFs do no additional cleaning of glass at their facilities. From the perspective of the MRFs, the primary issues with recycled glass are wear and tear on equipment, lack of markets, contamination, and cost.

The survey also revealed that only 6 of the 45 respondents have a total percentage of non-glass residuals and fines of 10 percent or less. Of these, five facilities serve communities with either curbside separation of glass or dual stream recycling programs and/or have invested in equipment to separate the glass from other recyclables.

After a thorough analysis of the compiled survey data, consideration of drastic changes in New England's glass markets, and global market shifts, NERC and its Glass Committee drew the following conclusions about the region's MRF glass:

- To increase the quality of the region's MRF glass, greater emphasis is needed on measuring and reducing contamination levels, as well as cleaning the glass at the MRFs.
- The collection methods used by the communities being served, and/or investments in glass cleaning equipment by MRFs, can produce cleaner material. Although NERC's survey did not focus on best practices for managing glass at MRFs, lessons can be learned from the six MRFs that produce the highest quality glass, and the communities they serve. Of these, five MRFs serve communities that offer source separation of glass curbside and/or dual stream recycling programs, and two of the MRFs keep glass separated at their facilities. In addition, four of the MRFs have made upgrades in the past three years and do additional cleaning of the glass with a variety of equipment.
- More glass processing capacity is needed in New England. The loss of one bottling manufacturer and two glass processing facilities in New England has created a need and opportunity for additional glass processing and markets in the region.
- End markets for MRF glass are dependent upon the availability of local processors and manufacturers (500-mile radius for transporting MRF glass to processors and manufacturers).
- Existing and emerging alternative end markets are an option for MRF glass throughout the region (e.g., Pulverized Glass Aggregate, glass foam aggregate, pozzolanic cement or concrete).

Forty-nine percent of the Northeast MRFs contacted by NERC responded to the survey. The survey results are a snapshot in time about the region's MRF glass, and may or may not be representative of the entire region.

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