



WENDY M. LEVY/THE COMMONS

The team that makes the Northeast Recycling Council go. From left, Executive Director Lynn Rubinstein, Assistant Director Mary Ann Remolador, Projects Manager Athena Lee Bradley (holding Zebina, the office mascot), and Office Manager and Bookkeeper Robert Kropp.

NEWS

Northeast Recycling Council turns 30, takes on new tasks

By Wendy M. Levy/*The Commons*

BRATTLEBORO—The Northeast Recycling Council celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. And in more good news for the Brattleboro-based nonprofit, the Council was recently chosen to help coordinate the Vermont Green Business Program.

The Green Business Program, an environmental assistance and recognition program for companies operating under sustainable business practices, is administered by the Vermont Environmental Assistance Office of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

Although most laypeople don't know about Northeast Recycling Council, their influence extends into a variety of home and work situations. The Council is largely responsible for a number of once unusual projects that now seem routine: paper recycling in offices, municipal composting, electronics recycling, and the collection of unwanted medications.

Their mission is "to promote sustainable materials management by supporting traditional and innovative solid-waste best practices, focusing on waste prevention, toxics reduction, reuse, recycling and organics recovery."

Founded in 1987, the Council was initially a special project of the Council of State Governments Eastern States Division, and soon became its own nonprofit entity. Assistant Director Mary Ann Remolador told *The Commons*, "When more attention was needed for recycling because the EPA issued requirements, the states needed help figuring things out."

The Council worked on projects that bridged the gap between municipalities and businesses with materials to recycle and manufacturers looking to turn the refuse into new products.

"We set up collections and [materials] streams" of recyclable materials, Remolador said, noting that when manufacturers began receiving a "steady supply, they could incorporate more recyclables into their products" and achieve the council's goal of reducing what goes into landfills.

"From the beginning, we were very active with the paper industry," Remolador said, explaining that in the early days of recyclables, "the biggest identified problem" was diverting paper from the waste stream.

One of the Council's greatest successes, according to Remolador, came soon after it was founded, when the group got the Newspaper Publishers Association to use recycled paper in their printing presses. "They were a very early adopter, and this made headlines. It was huge. It meant paper recyclers had a place to send paper to," she said.

Working with the U.S. Postal Service was another early achievement, Remolador said. The Council helped the Postal Service transition into recycling the enormous amounts of paper that passes through their system.

From there, the Northeast Recycling Council began working with different industries to move more materials — plastics, organics, electronics — from the solid-waste stream to recycling and repurposing.

"For the last two years, [the Council] has administered, with the National Center for Electronics Recycling, the Vermont E-cycle program," Office Manager and Bookkeeper Robert Kropp said. "Citizens, nonprofits, schools, and charities can drop off seven or fewer pieces of electronic equipment, such as computer peripherals and televisions, to waste-transfer sites around the state for free," Kropp said.

"The Council ensures the equipment is stored and collected correctly, there's good signage, and they clear the hard drives" on laptops and computers, Kropp said.

From there, the transfer stations put in shipment requests once they have collected enough equipment. Then, Kropp issues a bill of lading and arranges for transporters to pick up items and bring them to recycling facilities where the electronics are broken down and their reusable parts are salvaged.

"The Agency of Natural Resources pays the transfer facilities by the pound for the recycled electronics," Kropp said.

Now in its 17th year, the Vermont Green Business Program is a no-cost, voluntary program with 236 participating businesses including hotels, restaurants, marinas, golf courses, and grocery stores around the state. The Northeast Recycling Council is working with Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund to support the Green Business Program.

These days, the Green Business Program takes up most of Remolador's time at work — it's primarily her project. She said she, "helps [businesses] understand what it means to be a 'green' business in Vermont" — and get certified as one.

To learn more about Northeast Recycling Council, or to apply for certification in the Vermont Green Business Program, visit necr.org.



Originally published in *The Commons* issue #393 (Wednesday, February 1, 2017). This story appeared on page A3.

If you'd like to share this story on your website, please feel free to do so with credit to *The Commons* and a link back to commonsnews.org.



Download this week's newspaper

HOME
[News and Views](#)

NEWS
[VOICES](#)

[ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT](#)

[LIFE AND WORK](#)

[MILESTONES](#)

[Obituaries/Births/News of Windham County people](#)

[SUBMIT YOUR NEWS](#)

[SUBMIT COMMENTARY](#)

[Support us](#)

[BECOME A MEMBER](#)

We make our news available at no cost, but that doesn't mean it comes free. Reader memberships and donations make a huge difference and help all Vermont Independent Media programs, including *The Commons* and the Media Mentoring Project.

[Advertising](#)

[DISPLAY ADVERTISING](#)

Information and rates about advertising in *The Commons*

[WEB SITE ADVERTISING](#)

Information and rates about advertising on Commonsnews.org

[About us](#)

The Commons, Commonsnews.org, and the Media Mentoring Project are projects of Vermont Independent Media, a nonprofit source of news and media education in southern Vermont.

[Contact us](#)

Vermont Independent Media
139 Main St., #604
Brattleboro, VT 05301
802-246-5397
info@commonsnews.org

[General contacts](#)

Newsroom/submit announcements:
news@commonsnews.org
Advertising inquiries:
ads@commonsnews.org



Getting certified is not just complying with Act 148, Vermont's trash law, Remolador said, explaining, "I've developed a 'prerequisite checklist,' and a business has to comply with that before I even show up."

Some of the items on it include collecting waste oil from cooking, changing lightbulbs to LEDs or CFLs, and transitioning to 'green' cleaning products.

"It ups the ante once they complete the checklist," Remolador said.

Once the business completes the list, Remolador comes to the shop for a site visit. "I do a walk-through. It takes about an hour. I ask them things like, 'Do you have a low-flow toilet? A sink aerator? Are you really recycling? What are you doing to reach a zero-waste goal? Are you buying from local vendors?'" she said.

Other considerations include what a business does with pallets, boxes, and food containers. "Instead of creating a waste stream, send it back to the vendor!" Remolador said. Unused food can go to food banks, shelters, and soup kitchens, and scraps can go to farmers looking to feed animals or individuals seeking more organics for home compost piles.

"We will tell the businesses what to do, but they also have to tell us what they need to do. Each business is unique," Remolador said.

Remolador explained that for many businesses, "going green" means changing the work culture. She asks the owners and managers if they encourage workers to commute by bicycle, carpool, or company carpool van.

When deciding to certify a business as green, "we're looking for companies that take these things seriously and are decreasing their impact" on the planet, Remolador said, adding, "this program gives them recognition," including getting a listing on the Northeast Recycling Council website.

Her work doesn't end with handing the owners a checklist and making demands in order to certify them. "I talk to them and help them with the next steps, such as where to get LED bulbs, how to clean for better energy efficiency, and who to talk to for more information," Remolador said.

Remolador's plan is to make changes to the Vermont Green Business Program to reflect "what it means to be a 'green' business... in today's era."

"Vermont's program will be one of the most progressive in the nation once it's done," she said.

"Things can change at [the Northeast Recycling Council] depending on what projects come in," Remolador said, noting "for so many years we worked only with state agencies."

Kropp explained the sources of the nonprofit's funding. The eleven state members pay dues, the corporate advisory members pay dues, and the Council receives revenue from projects and contracts with smaller entities.

Although the Council worked on many federally-funded projects in the past, those grants have "shrunk considerably" in the past decade, Kropp said.

Now the bulk of the work performed by Remolador, Kropp, Executive Director Lynn Rubinstein, and Projects Manager Athena Lee Bradley comes from state and industry contracts.

Recently, the Council expanded its scope, implementing a fee-for-service program. "People can hire us — businesses, municipalities, trade organizations — for reuse, recycling, green purchasing, organics," Remolador said.

With President Trump's refusal to acknowledge climate change and his gutting of the EPA, are leaders of the Northeast Recycling Council concerned about its future?

"There's certainly a lot of speculation," Remolador said, noting in her conversations with EPA employees, they are "worried, and they'll get hit [with funding cuts] before we do."

With the EPA grant freeze, Remolador wonders "do we stop doing what we do?" noting "long ago we sought alternative sources of funding," and "we're not solely dependent" on the EPA.

"I'm not ready to say 'yes' yet" to the end of the Northeast Recycling Council's projects, she said, noting some of Trump's statements indicate he will shift responsibilities and decisions to the states. "That's where we come in. That's where we started," she said.

"Our programs help businesses. A truly sustainable business will be around for ages," Remolador said, adding "the current administration should be into" what the Council does.

"What we represent are actions that can't go away because there's no alternative," Kropp said.

What do you think? Leave us a comment

Editor's note: Our terms of service require you to use your real names. We will remove anonymous or pseudonymous comments that come to our attention. We rely on our readers' personal integrity to stand behind what they say; please do not write anything to someone that you wouldn't say to his or her face without your needing to wear a ski mask while saying it. Thanks for doing your part to make your responses forceful, thoughtful, provocative, and civil. We also consider your comments for the letters column in the print newspaper.