



PRESS RELEASE

COMPOST

Make dirt, not waste.

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The true cost of NOT composting: climate change and disease. Eureka Recycling releases first report of its kind to quantify the environmental, financial, and social impacts of composting.

Saint Paul, MN—Composting food waste can help conquer climate change and prevent disease. A new report released today by Eureka Recycling at MN Goes Green translates the environmental and human health impacts of composting, instead of wasting, organic food scraps and paper. In 2001 in Minnesota, over three million tons of municipal solid waste was buried in landfills or burned in incinerators—a quarter of which could have been composted.

Zero-Waste Composting: How Food Waste Can Help Conquer Climate Change and Prevent Disease, looks at financial costs of composting, along with seven categories of impacts to public health, the environment, and ecosystems, including particulates, toxics, and carcinogens. As the global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂) rises beyond 400 parts per million for the first time in human history, the report quantifies the environmental, social, and economic benefits of composting food waste instead of burying or burning it in landfills and incinerators. The report provides a comparative analysis of the different methods for composting as well as the benefits of preventing food waste and composting at home in backyards.

“Clearly composting has immense benefits—lots of people already intuitively know this,” explained Tim Brownell, CEO of Eureka Recycling, a local nonprofit organization. “This report combines the hard costs of collection and education with the human and environmental costs, so communities have a model that helps them make sense of the potential of composting,” explained Brownell. “Budget-conscious cities now have a more complete calculation to consider as they contemplate investments in composting programs. They can now see the true cost to residents of not composting.”

Zero-Waste Composting explains that a comprehensive approach to composting requires that we first make efforts to eat the food we buy, then compost as close to the source as possible, and only collect what is left. All of this is done to preserve and create soil, a rapidly depleting resource that our lives depend on. This approach, the report says, ensures that compost has the highest benefit for the environment and the community.

Curbside composting collection programs are increasing across the county and slowly catching on in some parts of Minnesota. In Hennepin County there are 12 cities with this service, in large part because of the county's effort to offset the costs to encourage residents to compost. According to Eureka, when curbside collection programs are designed to collect compostable materials in a separate compartment on recycling trucks that are already passing by houses every week, they generate a savings of \$83 per ton in environmental and human health costs when compared with disposal.

But collection is just part of the picture. ***Zero-Waste Composting*** finds that preventing wasted food provides the greatest environmental impact by reducing the upstream production and transportation emissions; providing twice the benefit of a curbside collection program. And, as the report explains, prevention also protects the pocketbooks of residents and cities. The average Saint Paul family can save up to \$96 per month on groceries by preventing wasted food. While not all organic waste is preventable (like banana peels) or possible to compost in a backyard (like meat or nonrecyclable paper), including prevention with another collection method can reduce the per-ton program costs by more than \$100/ton.

In conjunction with the release of ***Zero-Waste Composting***, Eureka Recycling launched a new website www.MakeDirtNotWaste.org with free prevention tools. People can download a meal planner, shopping tools, a food storage guide, and more. They can view helpful videos as well as join an online conversation to connect with others striving to reduce food waste and save money.

The Twin Cities, like other major cities, are facing the challenge of poor soils and soils contaminated with heavy metals. Hazardous amounts of lead have been documented in the backyards and communities of such major cities as New York, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis, where residents are making efforts to grow food. Using compost to displace petrochemical fertilizers saves \$48.82 in environmental and human health costs for every ton of compost used. And, bringing finished compost back to a community can be a powerful tool for community building—especially when used as soil remediation or a

resource to support existing local food and community gardening movements. Although returning finished compost to a community adds to the cost of the program, soil is currently being shipped in at a greater cost to the community from other parts of the state, and sometimes even from out of state.

Eureka Recycling will use the report findings in the communities it serves, including its hometown of Saint Paul, MN, where it has operated for over a decade and is creating a demonstration that waste is completely preventable. Last year, Eureka Recycling provided the City of Saint Paul with a proposal for a comprehensive composting program—including education for prevention and returning compost to improve Saint Paul soils. The City wanted to conduct a public process to hear directly from residents before making decisions for the 2014 budget. The City contracted with Wilder Research for part of the process and accepted online feedback directly via a discussion on *Open Saint Paul Forum*, which recently closed. This input process has ended and the City is expected to release a recommendation soon.

Zero-Waste Composting: How Food Waste Can Help Conquer Climate Change and Prevent Disease is available on Eureka Recycling's Zero-Waste Composting website:

www.makedirtnotwaste.org

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Eureka Recycling's services, programs, and policy work present solutions to the social, environmental, and health problems caused by wasting. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, based in the Twin Cities, Eureka Recycling's mission is to demonstrate that waste is preventable, not inevitable. Locally Eureka is well-known as the largest nonprofit recycling operation because it has provided curbside and apartment recycling services for over a decade. Eureka has previously released nationally-recognized reports on Curbside Recycling Collection Methods, Multifamily Recycling, and Public Space Recycling. For more information, visit Eureka Recycling's composting website: www.makedirtnotwaste.org or call 651-222-7678.