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TOP STORY

## Iowa DNR sets meeting on new approach to waste management

By Mary Stroka | The Center Square contributor

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Trash and recycling containers are seen in December 2018 in Tiffin, Iowa.

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(The Center Square) – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is transitioning to a new solid waste management system for the state after nearly 40 years of “relatively little change” in laws.

“Solid waste laws, policy and programs are not keeping up with the changes in current technology and material use and the impacts of those materials on our environment,” Iowa Department of Natural Resources Financial & Business Assistance Supervisor Jennifer Wright told The Center Square in an emailed statement. “By making this change, it would allow the department to prioritize policies and programs that conserve resources, make the most use of the resources we have, increase economic activity and in turn protect Iowans health, safety and the environment.”

Wright said the major change is the emphasis of the plan. The new system would manage the entire “life cycle” of materials – including design, raw material extraction, manufacture, transport, consumption, use, reuse, cycling and disposal – instead of solely their disposal so resources and waste can be “managed in the most beneficial way” for the economy, the environment, and social impacts, she said.

Social impacts include changes in purchasing habits based on sustainability factors.

“SMM looks at environmental impacts throughout a materials lifecycle rather than what can be done at the point of disposal, which is limiting and unsustainable,” Wright said. “There will always be an element of end of life management but how can we get the most use or reuse of resources, materials and products before it no longer has a life?”

The state is in Phase 2 of **its transition to Sustainable Materials Management**. The focus currently is on policies, programs, and gathering data and life cycle analysis to support the new approach, Wright said. Later in the process, stakeholder meetings and dialogue will determine “any potential cost savings,” she said.

“It is likely that there could be associated cost savings that affect all Iowans,” she said.

Funding for the SMM Initiative comes from the Solid Waste Tonnage Fees-Solid Waste Alternatives Program, Wright said. The department spent \$48,500 in a December 2018 to September 2019 contract with Burns and McDonnell Engineering Company, Inc. to facilitate the **Phase I discussion** to identify a vision and plan for the change. The department has contracted with SCS Engineers.

Stakeholder and subcommittee meetings in Phase 2 will include gauging public health and environmental impacts of materials throughout their lifecycle, setting priorities for the new system, researching other states' implementation of Sustainable Materials Management, and facilitating consensus among stakeholders for policies, programs and funding.

**Preregistration is required** for the meeting, which will be held from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sept. 30 via Zoom. After the Sept. 30 meeting, the next meeting is tentatively planned for the end of March 2022, Wright said.

Wright said they encourage Iowans who are interested in the current solid waste management system, the impact waste and materials have on the environment, and how a different approach could impact Iowans and the environment.

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### Editor's Note

This story has been edited since initial publication to include additional information from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources on the social impacts of the department's plans and next steps following the Sept. 30 meeting.