

MARYLAND'S SOURCE REDUCTION (SR) CREDIT REPORTING SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Background

The Governor's Solid Waste Management Task Force (Task Force), affirming the recommendations of the Maryland Recycling Advisory Group (Advisory Group), recommended that Maryland establish a voluntary statewide goal of 40% diversion by the year 2005. For purposes of this new diversion goal, the Task Force recommended defining each county's waste diversion rate as the sum of its recycling rate, as calculated under the Maryland Recycling Act of 1988, plus up to 5% for counties which qualify for a source reduction (SR) credit.

Consistent with the Task Force's recommendations, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has established qualifications for the SR credit (maximum = 5%). To achieve this, MDE convened a seven-member Source Reduction Work Group, which submitted its recommendations for implementing a SR credit system, including a county reporting form.

Definitions of "Source Reduction" and "County"

For purposes of Maryland's SR credit system, SR is defined as "preventing waste from occurring which in turn prevents the need to manage it by recycling or disposal. SR means the design, manufacture, purchase, or use of materials or products to reduce the amount of waste and includes reuse, waste elimination, package reduction and substitution" (Advisory Group, 1995). The term "County" means any entity, whether a county or regional reporting group, which submitted its required Maryland Recycling Act solid waste/recycling accounting forms for the applicable calendar year.

Why is Source Reduction Important?

SR is at the top of the solid waste management hierarchy because it is generally superior to both recycling and disposal from an environmental and economic perspective. For example, moving trash and recyclables from one place to another means dirtier air in Maryland residents' lungs and less money in their wallets. SR is a proactive, practical way to preempt the need to collect, process, and/or dispose of trash and recyclables by preventing their generation up front.

Why is a Source Reduction Credit System Needed?

Maryland needs a SR credit system to spur greater attention to the important benefits SR offers. As the Advisory Group recognized in 1997, "little focus, planning or funding has been dedicated to this technique in Maryland." One reason for this is that SR activities can reduce recycling tonnages and therefore recycling rates. For example, yard waste grasscycled or home composted does not count as recycling tonnage, while yard waste collected, weighed, and composted at a central location does. The SR credit checklist system MDE established helps to offset this disincentive for SR.

This SR credit system also reflects a realization that it is better to give credit for a wide range of worthwhile SR activities than to confine recognition to the very few SR activities where tonnage diversion can be assessed reliably. Similarly inclined, Minnesota and Oregon developed SR credit systems during the 1990's. The Source Reduction Work Group carefully considered these states' SR credit systems before recommending a SR credit system for Maryland.

Taking a Closer Look at the Source Reduction Credit Checklists

Each county seeking SR credit may choose the action options best suited for that county, and adjust each year. The SR credit system also encourages regional cooperation and partnering with businesses, non-profits, etc. A county may receive credit for a listed SR activity that is conducted in association with another partner or partners, whether inside or outside the county. However, to maintain a reasonable level of rigor to the checklists, a county may not receive SR credit unless there is at least some involvement by the county government seeking credit. Additionally, many of the checklist items require source reduction activity of an ongoing nature.

The SR credit checklists are designed to encourage counties with less advanced SR programs to build momentum, and to inspire counties with more advanced SR programs to pursue continuous improvement. Accordingly, the SR credit checklists feature clusters of two to three questions relating to certain SR activities (*e.g.*, materials exchanges and SR site visits to major businesses). The number of "Yes" responses by counties to each cluster of questions will depend largely on the intensity of effort put forward or degree of difficulty overcome. Overall, the SR checklists are intended to offer opportunities and challenges to every county in Maryland, regardless of size or resources.

Counties submitting SR Credit Report forms must document their SR activities as outlined on the SR Credit Report form. Counties are encouraged to provide MDE with lists of any SR activities they believe should be considered for inclusion in future SR checklists.

Mandatory Recycling Rates Unaffected by New Source Reduction Credit System

Important: This SR credit system does not apply to the mandatory recycling rates (15% and 20% levels) established in the Maryland Recycling Act of 1988, and which the Task Force recommended should be retained. Counties must continue to provide MDE with Maryland Recycling Act solid waste/recycling accounting forms on an annual basis. While counties are encouraged to provide MDE with SR Credit Reports on an annual basis, this is voluntary.

For Further Information

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