OCRRA
(Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency)

SWANA Integrated Solid Waste Systems Excellence Award Application

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Thank you.

Every time you recycle your newspapers, cereal boxes, junk mail, magazines, drink cartons, cardboard and other things made of paper, you’re making my world cleaner and my future brighter. Thank you for putting stuff in your blue bin. It may seem like a small act—but to me, it makes all the difference in the world.

Save the world a little each day.

See how at www.OCRRA.org
Executive Summary

Onondaga County, NY boasts one of the most innovative and cost effective solid waste programs in New York State. Coordinated and implemented by OCRRA (Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency), this program demonstrates an optimal balance of environmentally sound disposal and recycling options, fiscal responsibility, and outstanding community relations. Elements include: state-of-the-art facilities with exemplary safety and environmental records; one of the highest annual recycling rates in the state and much of the country (in 2010: 60%); an award-winning compost program, serving as a model for the rest of New York State; unique long-term agreements with local recycling facilities, municipalities and haulers; numerous partnerships with local businesses; and an extensive and popular public education program. Together, these features make up a comprehensive and effective solid waste and recycling program for the residents, businesses, and institutions within Onondaga County.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ...................................................................................................................... 2
1. Overview of System and System Performance ..................................................................... 3
   Background ............................................................................................................................... 3
   System Elements ...................................................................................................................... 3
   Design Strategy ......................................................................................................................... 7
   Technological Effectiveness ...................................................................................................... 8
   Long-Term System Availability ................................................................................................. 8
   Customer Service ...................................................................................................................... 9
   Environmental Protection and Regulatory Compliance ........................................................... 10
2. Financial and Business Management .................................................................................. 10
   Financial Goals ........................................................................................................................ 10
   Operational Goals ................................................................................................................... 11
   Cost Effectiveness ................................................................................................................... 12
   Planning and Forecasting .......................................................................................................... 12
   Employee Relations Program .................................................................................................. 12
   Change Management Processes .............................................................................................. 13
3. Community Relations ........................................................................................................... 13
   Public Education .................................................................................................................... 13
   Community Outreach ............................................................................................................. 14
   Community Considerations and Partnerships ......................................................................... 15
4. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 16
1. Overview of System and System Performance

Background
The upstate community of Onondaga County, NY has one of the most comprehensive and successful waste and recycling programs in New York State. OCRRA (Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency), a non-profit public benefit corporation, coordinates and implements a variety of trash and recycling programs through innovative systems, extensive public education, and unique partnerships.

OCRRA is managed by a 15-member volunteer Board of Directors. The agency serves 33 municipalities within Onondaga County, which constitute a unique combination of urban, suburban and rural communities. The largest municipality is the City of Syracuse, located at the center of the county. Approximately 450,000 people reside in Onondaga County and there are over 183,000 occupied households. OCRRA’s service area includes over 150 schools, numerous universities, including Syracuse University, and over 30,000 businesses.

OCRRA offers a wide range of waste disposal and recycling options to the public. The community’s mandatory recycling program is one of its greatest achievements: Each year, the county does an exemplary job of recycling, with a waste reduction rate of over 60% each year. In fact, on a per capita basis, OCRRA helps the community recycle more material than any other large New York community, including New York City.

Revenue to support the OCRRA system does not rely on tax dollars, but instead uses funds generated at a Waste-to-Energy facility from tipping fees and the sale of electricity, as well as numerous New York State, federal and/or private grants. These funds allow OCRRA to continue its multitude of services, as well as its extensive recycling public education campaign.

System Elements
OCRRA’s system strives for the optimal balance of fiscal responsibility and environmentally sound solutions by combining a variety of cost-effective, convenient options for waste disposal, recycling, and reuse. Elements are detailed below.

Municipal Solid Waste
In 1994, OCRRA partnered with Covanta Energy to open and operate a Waste-to-Energy (WTE) facility in Onondaga County. Due to local flow control laws, this facility receives all municipal solid waste (MSW) from Onondaga County only.

The WTE (at right) converts all incoming trash into energy; and the solid waste is reduced in volume by 90%. This saves valuable landfill space and uses a renewable source of energy to serve about 35,000 homes in Onondaga County with electricity. Since beginning operation, the WTE Facility has processed over 4.6 million tons of MSW and has produced nearly 3 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity for the Central New York region. Over the past decade, the facility has saved more than 5.5 million barrels of oil that would have
otherwise been consumed to produce an equivalent amount of electrical power.

The WTE facility contains $15 million in state-of-the-art pollution control systems and meets all federal and state air emission standards. The air permit under which the facility operates is one of the strictest in the country.

Ash residue from the WTE is used for landfill daily cover. This beneficial reuse of ash means that other materials, such as clean soil, do not need to be used for landfill daily cover. The WTE generates approximately 80,000 tons of ash residue annually, which is about 10% of the original volume (or 25% of the original weight) of trash processed at the facility.

The WTE recovers ferrous metal during the combustion process for recycling using a magnetized system for separation. In addition to this system, which recovers approximately 10,000 tons of ferrous metals annually for recycling, the WTE utilizes a non-ferrous metal recovery system. The system consists of a special type of technology called an eddy current separator that induces a magnetic field in metallic objects that are not ordinarily magnetic, such as aluminum, copper, zinc, and brass. The non-ferrous system became operational in 2008 and recovers approximately 400 tons of non-ferrous metals annually for recycling. These metal recovery systems conserve natural resources by recovering metals that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

Transfer Stations
OCRRA owns and operates two transfer stations within Onondaga County which allow residents and businesses to bring construction and demolition debris (C&D), MSW, as well as recyclables for processing. The Ley Creek Transfer Station is conveniently located in the center of Onondaga County and is utilized mainly by commercial entities. The Rock Cut Road Transfer Station, located next to the WTE facility, is mainly used by residential customers. Incoming materials at each transfer station are sorted by laborers. Any MSW is transported to the WTE and any materials not able to be processed at the WTE are sorted for removal and direct delivery to a landfill. OCRRA holds a long-term contract with a nearby landfill to handle this type of waste (see Long-Term Availability for more details). Residential customers may purchase stickers to place on bags of garbage for disposal or pay a flat rate fee based on vehicle size. The recyclable drop-off is at no cost to the customers, and materials are ultimately transported by a private hauler to a local Material Recovery Facility, with which long-term contracts are also in place (see Long-Term Availability).

Recycling and Waste Reduction Program
OCRRA maintains an extensive, award-winning recycling and waste reduction program. With its robust set of recycling and waste reduction programs and communication efforts, OCRRA’s team helps the community recycle more material on a per capita basis than any other large New York community, including New York City. Onondaga County residents and businesses have consistently recycled more than 60% of their waste since the early 1990s.
OCRRA provides plastic curbside recycling containers, “blue bins”, for residents at no cost to the user, available for pick up at town and village highway departments. Many of the 180,000 households in Onondaga County use two or more at the curb each week. In addition, OCRRA held multiple blue bin giveaway events in 2010 at local grocery stores throughout Onondaga County, handing out thousands of bins and a wealth of recycling information. OCRRA also provides business and institutions (schools, universities) with indoor recycling containers at no charge, to make recycling as convenient as possible.

OCRRA’s Source Separation law went into effect in 1990, specifying that certain materials must be recycled by residents and businesses. This list includes items such as paper and cardboard, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and glass jars. OCRRA continually evaluates materials’ feasibility of becoming a mandatory recyclable, by gathering insight from local Material Recovery Facilities and performing market analyses. Because of this, in 2010, #5 plastics were added to the list, which was well received by the public.

To ensure long-term stability of recycling in Onondaga County, OCRRA maintains a contract with two privately-owned Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). This contract is a valuable tool which allows OCRRA to formulate and maintain a uniform definition of “blue bin” recyclables. This uniformity helps facilitate the successful education and enthusiastic cooperation of the public.

In addition to the program for mandatory recyclables, OCRRA also offers outlets for many hard-to-recycle items. Below are some of those programs.

Hazardous Waste
One of the most popular services OCRRA provides are the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collections, which allow residents to safely dispose of their hazardous waste and keep these materials out of the waste stream. Three HHW events were held in 2010, serving a total of over 2,000 households. Among the hazardous wastes collected at these events were adhesives and resins; oil-based paint; paint thinner; solvents; thermometers, thermostats, and other mercury containing products; pesticides; and fluorescent light bulbs.

Household Batteries
Batteries often contain hazardous chemicals that should not be disposed of with MSW. To keep these out of the trash, OCRRA offers multiple outlets for battery disposal. OCRRA partners with nine Onondaga County Wegmans Grocery stores to provide convenient collection locations for batteries (at right).

Because of new federal regulations aimed at reducing safety hazards, batteries are now separated by type (alkaline, rechargeable, and button) before they are transported. OCRRA collects the batteries each week and transports them to various locations for proper disposal and/or recycling. In addition to Wegmans stores, OCRRA offers residents special yellow bags for battery collection that can be put out
curbside with their trash in the month of July. In 2010, a total of 81 tons were removed from the trash, 6 tons of which were rechargeable batteries.

**Fluorescent Bulbs**

Fluorescent light bulb use is on the rise due to high energy costs. However, these energy efficient bulbs contain mercury, a potentially harmful chemical. To encourage Onondaga County residents to dispose of these properly and keep mercury out of the trash, OCRRA partners with 15 local hardware stores to provide residents with convenient locations to drop off old bulbs. From the stores, the bulbs are shipped off for proper disposal. Over 5,000 bulbs were collected in 2010 at these stores.

**Electronic Waste**

For the past decade, OCRRA has offered recycling outlets for the increasing amount of old electronics in Onondaga County. OCRRA held multiple collection events each year; in 2010 two events were held. At these events, residents were able to drop off old computer equipment and TVs. A $10 fee was charged per TV, computer monitor, and laptop to cover recycling costs; all other equipment was collected at no charge. Onondaga County residents dropped off 406,000 pounds (203 tons) of e-waste to OCRRA for recycling in 2010 alone. Since the e-waste recycling program’s inception in 2002, OCRRA has collected nearly 4 million pounds of e-waste. (At right: An OCRRA employee helps a resident unload an old computer at an e-waste collection event.)

**Mercury Thermometer and Thermostat Exchange**

OCRRA offers a year-round mercury thermometer program to provide residents with non-mercury thermometers in exchange for their old mercury thermometers. The mercury thermometers collected are properly disposed of as part of OCRRA’s HHW collection program. In addition, OCRRA accepts old mercury thermostats. This program helps prevent mercury contained in household thermometers from escaping into the environment when the thermometers are broken or thrown away.

**Confidential Paper Shredding**

In response to increasing public concern over identity theft, OCRRA holds an annual Shred-O-Rama event at the local baseball stadium. In 2010, over 1,100 residents dropped off 27 tons of confidential documents to be shredded. Paper was shredded on site and then recycled by Confidata, a local shredding company. OCRRA also operates a commercial shredding machine for residential use year-round at the Rock Cut Road Transfer Station.

**Composting**

OCRRA’s yard waste composting program is extremely popular and used by thousands of residents. The agency operates two compost sites in the county, which gives the public convenient outlets for their yard waste. Residents, as well as municipal and commercial entities are able to drop off yard waste from April to November each year. Finished compost from the previous year is available for residents to take home as well. In 2010, residents were able to purchase $10 season passes which allowed them to drop off yard waste and take away up to 6 cubic yards of compost or mulch. Commercial entities pay per load. According to a recent survey of compost site users, one respondent noted: “I think that the whole operation is run very
smoothly at both locations - I think this is a wonderful resource for our community.” In 2010, almost 10,000 tons of yard and wood waste was received at the compost sites. (At left: Onondaga County resident dropping off her yard waste during the 2010 season.)

In 2008, OCRRA began exploring the feasibility of composting institutional and commercial food waste through a pilot project at its Amboy Compost Site. The pilot project consists of several hundred cubic yards of pre-consumer food waste from various participating grocers and institutions. The food waste is covered with finished compost and injected with air, using an extended aerated static pile system (EASP), which allows the pile to maintain aerobic conditions. Over 1,400 tons of food waste was processed at the site in 2010, including organic materials from Syracuse University’s dining halls (see picture, below), and regional Wal-Mart Superstores. OCRRA was recognized for this innovative composting system by the US Composting Council in 2010, as the Composting Program of the Year.

OCRRA has committed to investing substantial resources into development and improvement of the Amboy Compost Site to handle large-scale commercial and institutional food waste. The facility is targeted to process 15,000 tons of food waste per year; diverting it from landfills and ultimately producing over 36,000 cubic yards of compost. The project includes a storm water management plan with designs for an engineered wetland consisting of pretreatment forebays, shallow emergent marshland and deep water pools.

The Food Waste Project represents a major improvement and investment in OCRRA’s composting program and will serve as an environmentally sound, cost-effective model for food waste composting to be replicated by municipalities across the country. The first phase of the redevelopment plan will be initiated in late 2011.

**Integrated System**

The aspects of OCRRA’s solid waste and recycling system described above ensure long-term stability for the community, environmentally sound disposal options for a multitude of materials, continued recycling and waste reduction education, and a collection of innovative solutions that serve as a model for New York State and beyond.

**Design Strategy**

OCRRA’s entire solid waste management system has been designed to compliment New York State’s Solid Waste Management Plan. This previous plan, as well as the 2010 update to the plan, “Beyond Waste”, place emphasis on reduction, reuse and recycling (including composting). The OCRRA system not only balances these with environmentally sound disposal
options for non-recyclable items, but also focuses its entire public education program on them. OCRRA’s system models the state’s preferred solid waste hierarchy, with waste prevention, reuse and recycling preferred over disposal, and a preference for municipal waste combustion over landflling.

**Technological Effectiveness**

The WTE demonstrates remarkable technological effectiveness in regards to the combustion process, electricity generation, metal recovery, and minimizing air emissions. In 2010, the WTE processed 315,000 tons of non-hazardous, non-recyclable trash, and in doing so, generated enough electricity to power nearly 30,000 homes, as well as the facility itself. The facility’s metal recovery, consisting of a magnetized system for ferrous and an eddy current system for non-ferrous metals, recovered 10,000 tons of metal for recycling (see Section 1, Municipal Solid Waste for more details).

A state-of-the-art air pollution control system is integrated into the facility so that it may comply with one of the strictest air permits in the nation. Emissions from the facility are carefully monitored through continuous emissions monitors and annual stack testing. The 2010 stack testing results indicate that the facility continues to meet all its permit limits, with many of the parameters an order of magnitude below the permit limits.

OCRRA’s innovative food waste composting system, extended aerated static pile system (EASP) is a highly successful example of a cost effective and efficient method of creating high quality compost. EASP allows food waste to be converted to compost in a fraction of the time that it would take using windrows or other common practices. This shortens turn-around time which keeps the flow of usable compost steady and keeps space open for frequent food waste deliveries. It not only saves valuable time, but does so at a low cost. Because blowers periodically blast air into the system, EASP does not require significant man-hours to turn and tend to the piles, saving on labor costs as well.

**Long-Term System Availability**

To ensure the long-term stability of Onondaga County’s solid waste systems, OCRRA has established contracts with recycling facilities, 33 local municipalities in Onondaga County, haulers, and a landfill disposal site. These contracts create a foundation for long-term planning and stability for OCRRA, municipalities, local businesses and the public.

**Material Recovery Facility Contract**

Recyclables collected at the curb are taken for processing and marketing to private material recovery facilities (MRFs). The MRFs receive curbside recyclables collected by private haulers, municipal haulers and municipalities with private hauling contracts. The MRFs accept the recyclables at no charge to the waste hauler, and then sort, bale, and market the recyclables. The MRF contract provides for a variable payment to the private companies.

In 2010 OCRRA’s five-year contract agreement with private local MRFs was set to expire. A new four-year contract was negotiated over 2010, to begin in 2011. Two private local MRFs, operated by Waste Management Recycle America and Cellmark, Inc., respectively, signed on to the new long-term contract, which is an innovative way to ensure stability. It reduces OCRRA’s annual financial risk by creating a system that is market-based;
when the markets are low, OCRRA may pay the MRFs to ensure continued receipt of material; when the markets are high, the MRFs pay OCRRA to further the community public education program.

**Hauler Contracts**
OCRRA maintains multi-year contracts with local haulers to ensure long-term stability of the material delivered to the OCRRA system; the contracts require local haulers to deliver all municipal solid waste (MSW) to the WTE for the duration of the contract, guaranteeing that MSW will not leave the OCRRA system. These contracts provide a foundation which allows OCRRA to plan for revenue in the long-term, creating a stable system.

**Landfill Contract**
OCRRA continually maintains a contract with a local landfill for certain materials. In 2011, OCRRA entered into a new contract with High Acres Landfill, owned and operated by Waste Management, in Fairport NY, for delivery of ash residue from the WTE facility and by-pass material (material not able to be disposed of at the WTE). This contract is in effect through May 2015, with options to 2021, and ensures that OCRRA will have a stable outlet for the WTE ash and other material that cannot be combusted at the WTE.

**Customer Service**
OCRRA’s service area consists of approximately 450,000 residents, more than 30,000 businesses, and numerous institutions. Customer service is key to maintaining positive relations with the public and keeping them up to date on any pertinent information.

Residents use the OCRRA website (at right) frequently (receives over 10,000 visitors per month) to find answers to questions quickly and easily. This user-friendly website not only houses information on all of OCRRA’s programs and services, but also allows users to send an email directly to OCRRA staff for more information or requests. In addition, OCRRA staff are on hand to answer questions via phone during open business hours.

Also on the website is a simple order form that allows businesses, schools, and apartment managers to easily order recycling containers, decals and posters at no cost. OCRRA staff contact them after submittal and ensure they receive their supplies, through pick-up or delivery. This system also allows OCRRA staff to track and maintain contact information on users for future reference.

To measure how well the agency does with customer service, OCRRA frequently surveys residents and other users of various programs and services. Generally, this is done via email; however, paper surveys are mailed to those without email addresses. Data received from these surveys are reviewed and used to direct changes in program structure, determine public education focus and to help develop new programs. For example, each year OCRRA surveys compost site users after the close of the season. The survey given in early 2010 showed that many users suggested having more staff on hand to help them load compost into their vehicles. Because of this survey, OCRRA changed the structure of the compost site work schedules to
allow for workers to be available to load vehicles. According to the survey after the 2010 season, many users were glad to see this addressed.

Environmental Protection and Regulatory Compliance
OCRRA’s operations must comply with multiple federal and New York State regulations and permits.

Paramount to OCRRA’s WTE operations is ensuring that the facility’s emissions are protective of human health and the environment. A state-of-the-art air pollution control system is integrated into the facility so that it may comply with one of the strictest federal air permits in the nation. Emissions from the facility are carefully monitored through continuous emissions monitors (at right) and annual stack testing. The 2010 stack testing results indicate that the facility continues to meet all its permit limits for compounds such as mercury, lead and dioxins, with many of the parameters well below the permit limits. Another aspect of the permit to control for air emissions is a requirement to keep batteries, which can release toxic substances when combusted, out of the waste stream. OCRRA’s extensive battery collection program kept over 80 tons of batteries out of the WTE in 2010.

The New York State permit to operate the WTE requires the community to maintain at least a 40% processible recycling rate. “Processible” includes only materials that could have otherwise been disposed of at the WTE facility. For example, it does not include yard waste, which is an unacceptable waste at the facility. OCRRA has maintained higher than 40% for more than 10 years. In fact, in 2010 the processible recycling rate was 47%.

Other New York State permits include those to operate the two transfer stations and the two compost sites. As part of the expansion of the Amboy compost site, OCRRA has begun process to become a New York State permitted compost facility, which allows the site to receive more than 10,000 cubic yards of yard waste and more than 1,000 cubic yards of food waste each year.

2. Financial and Business Management

Financial Goals
OCRRA’s mission is to not only offer environmentally sound waste solutions, but to maintain fiscal responsibility. Financially, OCRRA strives to continue its current level of service and programs, while still maintaining a healthy financial picture.

OCRRA’s critical goal for the future is proper alignment of revenue with reward for its successful programs. In 2010, OCRRA faced a substantial lessening of revenues, due to decreased trash generation and lower rates for electricity sales at the WTE. In anticipation of this, the agency focused on cost savings, while maintaining high levels of service. OCRRA significantly reduced its spending in public education, as well as contractual and professional services. In numerous
instances, OCRRA sustained important environmental services, but with reduced frequency or scope of service, in order to cut costs.

Notable too in 2010 was the emergence of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which has the potential to change how many of OCRRA’s programs work. EPR shifts the financial burden for recycling many items, particularly e-waste, onto the manufacturers and away from municipalities. With the advent of New York State’s EPR legislation for e-waste, OCRRA ended its Community Collection Center operation, which had served as a drop-off point for residents’ e-waste for 3 years. The closure was both an ending of approximately $100,000 in annual program costs, and a beginning of the shift of end-of-life burdens.

Operational Goals

Safety
OCRRA holds its facilities and employees to the highest of safety standards. Each year, the goal is to have zero accidents at any OCRRA facility. OCRRA drivers continued to demonstrate their skills by logging nearly 550,000 miles driven without a motor vehicle accident in 2010. In addition, “lost time” accidents at the Transfer Stations remained at extremely low levels. These statistics reflect the safety consciousness of the workforce, which is reinforced by an ongoing, comprehensive Safety Training program for all employees.

WTE
2010 marked the facility’s 16th year of safe, reliable and efficient operations. Despite another difficult economic year with historically low trash tonnages, the facility maintained its strong operational track record. In 2010, the facility processed over 315,000 tons of non-hazardous, non-recyclable waste and, in doing so, generated over 218,000 megawatt hours of electricity – enough to power nearly 30,000 households and the facility itself. The facility’s metal recovery systems recovered 10,000 tons of ferrous and non-ferrous metal for recycling, which would have otherwise ended up in a landfill. Lastly, over 77,000 tons (25% of the original trash weight) of non-hazardous ash residue were sent to a landfill for use as alternative daily cover. The beneficial reuse of the ash residue means that other materials, such as clean soil, do not need to be used for landfill daily cover.

Coupling environmental and operational excellence at the Onondaga County WTE Facility with one of the highest nationwide overall community recycling rates, OCRRA certainly succeeds in achieving its mission of serving the local community with a world-class resource recovery system.

Recycling
Each year, the approximately 450,000 Onondaga County residents exceed expectations and maintain a fantastic recycling rate. In 2010, an impressive 38,900 tons of material was collected from households through the blue bin curbside recycling program alone.

In 2010, over 536,800 tons were recycled through mandatory and voluntary recycling (both residential and commercial) in the community, for a total recycling rate of 60%. OCRRA also
met permitting requirements set forth by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to maintain a 40% processible recycling rate, by reaching 47%, or 234,500 tons.

**Cost Effectiveness**
OCRRA compiles annual recycling data to determine how well the program is working overall. For more detailed analysis, data are broken down by material and sector (commercial and residential), some of which is estimated based on a previous waste composition analysis. Therefore, it is possible to identify potential areas, by sector or material, that have improved or that need improvement. By tying the data back to OCRRA’s individual program costs, it is possible to attribute tonnage or rate increases to particular programs. For example, OCRRA has focused its public education campaign toward capturing more paper. The year the campaign launched, 2009, paper recycling was the highest in OCRRA’s history – it rose by 14%. This infers that the message has been successful and that the campaign was worth the investment. It is important to note, however, that many programs’ focuses overlap, so it requires thorough analysis to determine which programs are most effective.

**Planning and Forecasting**
Each year, OCRRA’s Board of Directors carefully considers the following year’s budget, by evaluating program efficiency, financial status, and potential revenue changes. Necessary for long-term solid waste planning is the establishment of multi-year contracts to ensure various materials are directed to appropriate facilities. These include: a contract with local Material Recovery Facilities to ensure stability in the community’s recyclable material; a contract with local waste haulers that guarantees delivery of MSW to the WTE, ensuring a steady source of revenue; and a contract with a nearby landfill that accepts material not able to be processed at the WTE.

In 2010, OCRRA’s Board of Directors established a Strategic Planning Committee to examine contractual commitments, issues and possible strategic alternatives and options related to the time period from 2013 through 2022, with particular focus on contractual and other legal obligations around the calendar year 2015. This committee, the “2015 Committee” will examine the transitional issues related to this time period, when the lease with the WTE facility and service agreements are set to expire. The findings and recommendations of this committee are set to be finalized at the end of 2011.

**Employee Relations Program**
OCRRA employs over 65 full-time workers and several part-time labors as well. Full-time employees are offered health, dental and vision insurance as well as participation in the New York State Employees Retirement System and deferred compensation program (457 Plan). An Employee Assistance Program is available to all OCRRA employees and their families offering short term counseling through professional counselors. Full-time employees with one year of continuous service may be eligible for financial assistance for preapproved courses of study.

Workplace safety is a priority at OCRRA. Employees are given safety training by Occupational Safety & Environmental Association, Inc. (OSHA). Regular, mandatory training classes include:

**Change Management Processes**

OCRRA’s Change Management processes include creative marketing to enable communication between a variety of audiences including schools, businesses, and apartments. This includes a business recognition program, the Blue Ribbon Recycler, and a School Recycling pledge (see Section 3 for more details). OCRRA creates a popular newsletter each quarter to inform the public and frequently utilizes Survey Monkey to help gauge improvement of community awareness of the entire system, including WTE disposal infrastructure. OCRRA employs effective communications that inform various stakeholders of reasons for changes, the benefits of successful implementation, as well as details of any changes.

Operational changes in OCRRA’s systems occur infrequently. When they are made, they are often in response to customer feedback, economic concerns and business opportunities. For example, the transfer station service days and hours were changed in 2010 to better serve customers and also reduce staff over-time hours, by shifting to a Tuesday through Saturday schedule. Compost site hours were also expanded in response to technology changes in the implementation of commercial food waste composting.

OCRRA’s 15-member Board of Directors and management team devote time each year to review the agency’s mission and vision. This ensures that the agency’s programmatic and operational focus is maintained year after year.

**3. Community Relations**

**Public Education**

OCRRA is committed to maintaining high levels of community participation and engagement in all of its programs. OCRRA employs a professional recycling team tasked with spreading the recycling message and bringing technical assistance to the residents, schools, and businesses in Onondaga County. OCRRA’s three Recycling Specialists explore opportunities with businesses, apartments and institutions to assist with and improve their recycling. In 2010, the Recycling Specialists visited hundreds of local businesses, apartment complexes, and schools to offer assistance in designing recycling programs as well as free recycling containers and decals. In addition, OCRRA employs a New York State certified teacher, who spoke to more than 12,000 local students in over 500 classes in 2010.

To keep the public abreast of the recycling program, OCRRA continued its extensive public communication program throughout 2010. OCRRA's public message promotes the “why” of recycling and the difference one person can make in preserving natural resources for future generations. This campaign, launched in 2009, was based on community surveys asking what messages would resonate. It uses the slogan “Save the World a Little Each Day,” demonstrating that the simple act of recycling can help the environment in a meaningful way. This campaign also emphasizes the OCRRA website as a community resource.
In 2010, significant resources were devoted to direct public education through TV, web, and print media campaigns (see sample below). In addition to paid media advertising, OCRRA continues to publish its quarterly newsletter, which contains articles written by OCRRA staff that highlight special recycling events, stand-out businesses and schools, and inform the public about specific recyclable materials. OCRRA distributes the newsletter as an insert in the local Pennysaver, which reaches over 151,000 people on a quarterly basis. About 5,000 newsletters each quarter reach the public via public libraries, government offices (village and town clerks), and special events as well.

Perhaps one of OCRRA’s most effective means of communication is via email. Through an email blast system, emails covering various recycling topics and upcoming events are sent twice a month to approximately 17,000 people. In addition to the main list, OCRRA has the ability to create smaller sub-lists and send emails to select groups of people (such as compost site users or school teachers). The web software also allows for tracking of the number of people that open the emails, click on specific links, or forward it to others. Email blasts are an inexpensive and effective way of reaching thousands of people and are growing in popularity as the email address list grows each year.

New in 2010 was a Facebook page, effectively launching OCRRA into the social media platform. It has allowed people to actively engage in discussion about recycling and OCRRA’s services. New information about upcoming events, highlights of local recycling and waste reduction achievements, and links to recycling-related news are posted on a regular basis.

Community Outreach

In 2010, OCRRA’s recycling team participated in dozens of area events and fairs, including the Taste of Westcott Street (attended by Syracuse University students), CNY Blooms (a popular garden show), and Party for the Planet (at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse). A variety of recycling information was distributed including recycling instructions, battery bags and household hazardous information. OCRRA staff interacted with thousands of people at these events.

In addition to events, OCRRA Recycling Specialists conducted hundreds of presentations to a wide variety of audiences, including school-age children, business office staff, teachers, Rotary Clubs, and neighborhood groups. These presentations all provided information to the public on recycling, as well as the importance of environmental stewardship. OCRRA Recycling Specialists also shared their expertise with the recycling community by presenting at various conferences in
2010, including the NYSAR³ Conference in Cooperstown, NY and the North American Association for Environmental Education’s annual conference, in Buffalo, NY.

OCRRA’s largest and most popular event is the Annual Earth Day Litter Clean-Up. This is a community-wide two-day event, where residents form groups to pick up litter around Onondaga County. The groups register with OCRRA and are mailed stickers for the collected trash bags that guarantee free disposal. The event enjoys excellent community support, with over 71,000 pounds of litter collected by over 8,000 volunteers in 2010. In 2010, OCRRA was recognized for this program by Keep America Beautiful, a national organization focusing on litter cleanup and recycling. Over 1.8 million pounds of litter has been collected since the program began in 1994. (Above: An Earth Day Clean-Up group shows off the trash they collected during 2010’s event.)

Schools are an integral part of any community and an excellent opportunity to foster recycling education, as well as to help collect more recyclable material. OCRRA incorporated the power of community-based social marketing tools into its program to create the School Recycling Pledge. This pledge is printed on a large, framed poster and affirms the commitment a school must make in order to have an excellent recycling program. The pledge separates a school into four groups: (1) teachers; (2) students; (3) custodians; and (4) administrators, each with specific recycling jobs to perform. The pledge has each school’s name printed at the top, which allows them to retain ownership of their program. This program had been a huge success – over 120 schools in Onondaga County have their pledge and many of them report, via an online survey, increased knowledge about recycling amongst students and teachers, as well as an increase in the amount of materials being recycled. (Above: Students, teachers, custodians and the principal from Driver Middle School, in Marcellus, NY, pose with their school’s Recycling Pledge.)

In addition, OCRRA maintains a partnership with the Northern Onondaga County Library System (NOPL) to host Master and Backyard Composting classes, furthering compost education and awareness in the community. This low cost ($15 fee), 3-day class brought composting knowledge to many Onondaga County residents in 2010.

Community Considerations and Partnerships
OCRRA takes great pride in working with and supporting the local community. The positive relationship OCRRA maintains with residents, businesses and institutions allows the community to continually exceed recycling and waste reduction goals.
July, 2010 marked the 20th anniversary of Onondaga County’s recycling program. To celebrate, OCRRA organized a community-wide contest, the “Best Blue Bin on the Block” contest, which recognized excellent residential recyclers. From August to November, OCRRA staff scoured neighborhoods, looking for blue bins set out to the curb with the correct items inside. Each month, 25 residents were randomly selected to win gift cards to a local convenience store. In December, seven grand prize winners were selected to receive gift cards to various local businesses, as well as two SONY laptops, donated by RockTenn, a local paper recycling company. This contest was a way for OCRRA to not only say thank you to residents for 20 years of dedication to recycling, but to also increase awareness of the recycling program.

In addition to residents, OCRRA made a substantial effort to recognize local businesses that demonstrate recycling excellence in the workplace. The Blue Ribbon Recycler program asks interested businesses to meet specific criteria in regards to recycling, such as providing recycling containers for all employees and purchasing recycled paper. Once a Recycling Specialist determines that a business qualifies, it receives a certificate and recognition on the OCRRA website. This year, eight companies were awarded the Recycler of the Year Award for their respective business sectors (retail, tourism, manufacturing, etc.). This program gives OCRRA an opportunity to highlight those businesses doing a fantastic job recycling and allows other companies to access their accomplishments and use them as models. Over 40 businesses are certified to date and the list continues to grow. (At right: An OCRRA Recycling Specialist awards a local business with the Blue Ribbon Recycler certificate.)

Each year, OCRRA provides a "recycling credit" for various local charities, such as the Salvation Army and the Rescue Mission, for each documented ton of material (clothing, furniture, etc.) recycled through these human service organizations. The organizations were credited toward their monthly waste disposal fees through the OCRRA system, with certain limitations. OCRRA credited these organizations with approximately $44,000 in 2010 combined; relieving them of a significant portion of their waste disposal costs.

To ensure positive community relations at various facilities, OCRRA has implemented the best management practices for the transfer and compost sites to mitigate or eliminate odors, noises and any objectionable aesthetics put upon the public.

As described in Section 1, OCRRA maintains partnerships with many local retailers and companies to foster convenient and sustainable recycling solutions. To allow residents to dispose of fluorescent bulbs, OCRRA and 15 local hardware stores work together. Batteries are collected for disposal at nine local grocery stores. And, a local paper shredding company handles all material for the annual Shred-O-Rama event.

4. Conclusion

Each day, the community contributes to OCRRA’s mission of managing the solid waste produced in Onondaga County, whether by volunteering to pick up litter on Earth Day or by recycling daily at home, at school and at work. OCRRA is proud to provide education and services to the community that help improve our environment and to maintain an environmentally and fiscally sound solid waste system.