



Executive Summary

2017 Connecticut WRAP Campaign Report

Results show increase in consumer awareness, quantity and quality of film packaging recycled

Introduction

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) is collaborating with numerous partners on a statewide public outreach campaign to enhance the recycling of plastic bags, film, and wraps (aka “film packaging”¹). The Connecticut Wrap Recycling Action Program (CT WRAP) campaign began in early 2017 as a partnership between CT DEEP, the American Chemistry Council’s Flexible Film Recycling Group (FFRG), the Price Chopper and Adams IGA grocery chains, the Trex Company, the Connecticut Food Association, and a core group of regional/local recycling professionals (the WRAP Team). Like previous campaigns, the CT WRAP campaign encouraged consumers to recycle film packaging at retail stores and to keep film packaging out of curbside recycling bins.

The Campaign

Planning

The CT WRAP campaign benefitted from substantial planning and collaboration. For example, CT DEEP provided invaluable support by soliciting interested parties, coordinating the campaign Team, and providing education and outreach support throughout the state. The Connecticut Food Association served as the key intermediary with grocery retailers. More Recycling, a recycling consulting firm for FFRG, provided technical recycling support for retail and local government participants. And the FFRG helped coordinate activities and provided communications, media, and educational resources support. WRAP Team members met regularly via conference calls and worked on concurrent activities in various locations/communities/regions.

Campaign Goals

The WRAP Team agreed on the following campaign goals:

- increasing the *amount* of film packaging collected;
- improving the *quality* of film packaging collected;

¹ E.g., bags for groceries, newspapers, produce, and bread; dry cleaning wraps; bubble wrap and air pillows; product overwrap from bulk products (cases of water bottles, bathroom tissue, paper towels, etc.)

- improving awareness among Connecticut residents, focused on the Greater Hartford area, of film packaging recycling opportunities and the types of film packaging that can be collected at participating stores; and
- reducing contamination (i.e., film packaging erroneously placed in curbside bins instead of brought to retail stores) at Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs).

Public Outreach

While the CT WRAP campaign engaged throughout much of the state, the campaign focused primarily on the Greater Hartford Area (GHA). The public outreach campaign included advertising, media events/outreach, social media outreach, and film packaging recycling educational efforts. CT WRAP’s collective media outreach efforts, organized primarily by a local media consultant, resulted in significant and ongoing news coverage.

Campaign Results

Material Audits

Compared to baseline figures, the post-campaign material audits found:

- an 11 percent increase in the amount of plastic bags collected²;
- a 7 percent increase in the amount of “other film” collected³; and
- a 23 percent decrease in contamination (non-film packaging).

There was very little contamination. Like previous WRAP campaigns, the audits found virtually no food contamination, such as breadcrumbs, in either baseline or post-campaign audits.

In addition, East Hartford’s public outreach efforts led to a 100 percent increase in film packaging collected by the local ShopRite store. Additional efforts outside the GHA also resulted in increases in film packaging collected.

Consumer Awareness

Compared to pre-campaign consumer awareness figures among GHA residents, a post campaign survey found:

- a nine percentage point increase in respondents who said they heard to take back certain plastics to grocery stores (63 versus 54);
- significant increases in respondents who said they know which items to take back to stores (e.g., plastic bags: 15 percentage points increase, plastic bread bags: 17 points, plastic newspaper bags: 13 points); and
- a 10 percentage point increase in respondents who said that they take plastic film back to stores either “most of the time” or “always/all of the time” (40 versus 30).

MRF Contamination

² E.g., grocery, retail, and produce bags only

³ E.g., case wrap, product overwrap, bread bags, newspaper bags, etc.

The WRAP Team was unable to obtain reliable metrics on reduced film packaging contamination because area MRFs did not allow auditing. (Anecdotal evidence indicated a reduction.) This type of contamination is prevalent at MRFs across the country; WRAP participants continue to evaluate opportunities to measure post-campaign changes in contamination.

Conclusion

The CT WRAP campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of highly engaged stakeholders collaborating on a set of common goals. Material audits found that well-focused public outreach can lead to increased quantity and improved quality of film packaging collected for recycling. Consumer awareness surveys found that public outreach can increase awareness of what and where to recycle, as well as stated participation in recycling.

Critical success factors included: leveraging experience of previous WRAP campaigns; participation of key retailers; financial resources from FFRG and Proctor & Gamble to pay for media outreach efforts and advertising; strong leadership from a relevant government entity (state environment agency in this case); and meaningful participation by Team members.

These success factors are readily replicable in new WRAP campaigns.

END NOTE: Recent turbulence in the markets for recycled film plastics – in particular, China’s current reluctance to import film for recycling – requires additional efforts to help stimulate domestic markets. The CT WRAP Team began to explore options and opportunities to increase domestic markets during the campaign.