



The Environmental Justice Report

A publication of DEC's Office of Environmental Justice – Spring 2018



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

RGGI

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is the first mandatory market-based program in the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. RGGI is a cooperative effort among nine states—Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont—to cap and reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from electric generation facilities. Under the program, the states establish a cap on total CO₂ emissions in the region, with each individual state required to limit its share of emissions as set by the regionwide cap. States must also gradually tighten their emission limits over time, which will reduce overall CO₂ for the region.

If emissions decline faster than required under the cap, states may adjust the cap to achieve even greater reductions, as was the case in 2014 after a comprehensive program review. The RGGI states have proposed another adjustment to the cap, to go into effect in 2021, that will include an additional 30% reduction in the regional emissions cap by 2030.

Under RGGI, participating states sell emission allowances (which regulate the amount of pollution they can release into the air), primarily via auctions. States can then invest auction proceeds in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other consumer benefit programs designed to conserve energy, further reduce CO₂ emissions and/or develop clean technologies.

By participating in the multi-state, market-based program, New York has reduced carbon pollution from RGGI-affected power plants by more than 45 percent since 2005, while maintaining electricity system reliability, reducing electricity bills, and reaping economic benefit. In addition, over the same time period, other harmful air pollutants have been decreased more than 90 percent, and proceeds provided funding for public health benefit projects.

In his 2018 State of the State message, Governor Cuomo committed to strengthening RGGI even further, including revisions to address highly polluting “peaking” units not previously covered under RGGI. Peaking units are smaller power plants that operate intermittently during times of high electricity demand such as very hot summer days. Since these units are often in or near population centers, their emissions will disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities that already face a multitude of environmental burdens. DEC is writing regulations to implement these revisions and continue New York’s progress in reducing power sector emissions and addressing the concerns of residents in overburdened communities.

URBAN TREES

Multiple studies over the last decade have shown that living near nature is good for human health. Research has suggested that people who live in areas with greater access to green space and vegetation may enjoy better health and live longer lives. However, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, 80.7% of the U.S. population lived in a densely developed residential, commercial, or other nonresidential area classified as either urbanized (50,000 or more residents) or an urban cluster (2,500 – 50,000 residents). Modern cities, while boasting several conveniences, including a more diverse culture, walkable neighborhoods, public transport, and higher median incomes, also may present a host of health factors, such as increased air pollution, industrial and waste dumping sites, water safety issues, and heatwaves.



Planting trees in urban areas can provide many benefits to residents. Research has shown that trees are capable of both cooling and cleaning the air in urban spaces. In addition to providing shade and removing harmful particulate matter from the air, trees are also capable of redirecting some of the sun’s energy into their own biological processes, which lowers the ambient temperature, and urban green spaces catch storm runoff. Some studies have shown that an increase of green space, i.e. reclaimed brownfields, well-kept lawns, etc., might be related to a reduction in crime.

In terms of economic benefits, 100 properly cared for trees can catch 139,000 gallons of rainwater per year. Strategically planted trees can reduce annual air-conditioning costs by as much as 56%, and block winter wind to save 3% on heating bills. Healthy trees also increase property values, and inspire healthy, safe communities, which may stimulate investment and renewal in these areas.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can support tree planting in urban communities, please visit: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4957.html>.

FOOD WASTE/ON THE FRONT LINES PROFILE

It is estimated that Americans waste 25 percent of the food we purchase. This waste comes from food that spoils before it is cooked, not eating all the food we prepare, or purchasing items we simply never consume. This level of waste can have devastating impacts on the environment. Food sent to landfills breaks down and generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Wasting food also wastes the resources used to produce, transport, and store food products, including water and energy.



Do you want to learn more about DEC's dedicated staff? Check out "On the Front Lines," a series of video profiles celebrating the stories of DEC staff throughout the state and the important work they do to protect the environment, conserve New York's vast natural resources and serve the public. Catch "On the Front Lines" monthly on DEC's website, Facebook and Twitter pages.

To combat food waste, DEC employees like Gary Feinland, an Environmental Program Specialist (EPS) in DEC's Division of Materials Management (DMM), encourage food recovery methods. Food recovery is the collection of edible food from restaurants, grocery stores, dining facilities, and other locations that would otherwise be wasted. Recovered or rescued food that may not be resold can be distributed to emergency food programs and shelters. However, the best way to prevent food waste is by reducing the volume of surplus food generated. "It's great if it gets composted," Gary says, "It's better if it wasn't produced in the first place."

Gary started his career with DEC in 1998 as an EPS in the Division of Environmental Remediation, where he helped track hazardous waste cleanups. Gary's passion for waste reduction led him to DMM's Bureau of Waste Reduction and Recycling, and eventually its Organics Reduction and Recycling Section. He notes that "working on wasted food is a wonderful coming together to solve two societal challenges: wasted food in our disposal facilities and not enough access to healthy food for people who really need it."

In 2017 DEC awarded 3.5 million to support the donation of wholesome food and municipal organics recycling projects across the state (see <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/112385.html>). To learn more about Food Waste Recovery and the Division of Materials Management, including funding available through the Environmental Protection Fund's Municipal Recycling and Climate Smart Communities grant programs, visit these DEC webpages: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/98102.html>; <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8798.html>; <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/4776.html>.

LAWN & GARDEN EQUIPMENT EMISSIONS

Spring has sprung in New York State, and summer is just around the corner. With the warmer days here, many people have lawn and outdoor maintenance on their to do lists. Keep in mind that lawn and garden equipment can be a substantial source of air pollution. Gas powered engines from maintenance equipment such as lawnmowers, tractors, chainsaws, wood chippers, utility, farm, and even construction and light industrial equipment emit air pollutants through exhaust. Those air pollutants react with sunlight on hot days to form ozone, also known as smog. Young children, elderly people, and those with existing respiratory challenges, such as asthma, can be dramatically affected by high levels of ozone.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a new gas-powered lawn mower produces as much volatile organic compounds (VOC) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions in one hour of operation, as 11 new cars each being driven for one hour. Additionally, some lawn and garden equipment can be loud causing noise pollution, with leaf blowers being a specifically prevalent cause.

FOLLOW THESE TIPS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF YOUR LANDSCAPING:

1. Use a manual (reel) mower for small lawns.
2. When shopping for mowers and garden equipment, look for greener technologies such as electric and battery-powered equipment that are quieter and pollute less.
3. Properly maintain lawn and garden equipment - tune mowers and change the oil, as recommended.
4. If you are purchasing commercial grade landscaping equipment, look for options that reduce pollution including; electronic fuel injection and catalytic exhaust systems.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

For more information, please check out the following websites:

NYSDEC Leaf Blowers: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/109428.html> (recently updated)

NYSDEC Reducing AP from Lawn and Garden Equipment: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8554.html>

NYSDEC Portable Fuel Containers: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8581.html>

NYSDEC Clean Air Starts at Home: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/49263.html>

NYSDEC What to Do with Fall Leaves: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/46613.html>

NYSDEC Air Quality Index (AQI) Forecast: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/34985.html>



Van Cortlandt Park

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: FRIENDS OF VAN CORTLANDT PARK, BRONX

The Bronx, the northernmost borough of New York City, is the third most densely populated county in the U.S and contains five of America's poorest congressional districts. Yet, the Bronx also has the most parkland in NYC. One of these parks, Van Cortlandt, is the third largest in New York City. For the last 25 years, the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park (FVCP), an independent community-based organization, has been actively promoting conservation and improvement of this space. Through environmental education, research, restoration and enhancement of the park's forests, waters and trails, the group maintains the park as a sanctuary to surrounding communities and residents.

In 2017, DEC's Office of Environmental Justice awarded FVCP a Community Impact Grant to support the group's monitoring of Tibbetts Brook and Van Cortlandt Lake.

This effort includes biweekly water sampling of nutrients, dissolved oxygen, conductivity and bacteria levels within the brook to assess its health. One aspect of this monitoring features mycoremediation, a process that uses certain fungi to remove chemicals and harmful bacteria. FVCP staff will be building a mycoboom, which is a floating mixture of straw and fungi encased in a burlap sack that breaks down harmful chemicals into nonharmful components.

The grant will also fund educational programs at Tibbetts Brook for students and adults, including chemical monitoring, searching for benthic invertebrates, the creation of maps for public viewing, and the removal of aquatic invasive species. These projects will enhance the organization's understanding of Tibbetts Brook and improve public outreach efforts. By performing this work, volunteers and staff will rewrite the narrative on urban waterways, replacing the long-held image of pollution through education and a better understanding of this valuable resource, which will positively influence future management decisions.

We are accepting applications for Environmental Justice Community Impact Grants until 3:00PM July 9th, 2018. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html>.

INVASIVE SPECIES AWARENESS WEEK

New York State is celebrating its fifth annual Invasive Species Awareness Week (ISAW) from July 8th-14th. ISAW is an educational campaign that aims to provide New Yorkers with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to protect the state's lands and waters from the negative impacts of invasive species. Last year, more than 150 events were held statewide, ranging from workshops and guided hikes to presentations, film screenings and much more! Want to get involved? Visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/105650.html> or contact your local Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) coordinator through <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/47433.html>.



A volunteer at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center learns to identify aquatic invasive plants during an iMap Invasives workshop.

APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low income and environmental justice communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our website: www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html.

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting the state of New York?

JOIN OUR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LISTSERVE

Go to: www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html and sign up to receive regular updates from the Office of Environmental Justice. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact the Office of Environmental Justice with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: justice@dec.ny.gov.

Please include:

- Your location/address
- City, town, village or borough
- The environmental concerns you wish to address
- List the potential source if you know
- How or whether you wish to be contacted

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