

## **John Frederick**

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## **Background**

I serve as chair of the National Recycling Coalition's National Standards Certification Board that has overseen the development of a national standard for state, regional and topical professional training programs for Sustainable Materials Management (SMM). My paying job is as executive director of the council of governments (COG) that administers the recycling and composting in metropolitan Altoona, Pennsylvania. Prior to my employment with the Intermunicipal Relations Committee COG, I spent eleven years with the Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania and helped the state recycling organization initiate and build its professional training program.

## **National SMM Plan Recommendations**

*Importance of Professional Training* Having spent more than a dozen years as an educator early in my career, I have especially come to appreciate the value of professional training in enhancing recycling programs in particular and SMM in general. Thinking that SMM will gain the foothold it should without well-educated and well-trained professionals is akin to trying to build a house on top of a poorly built foundation. It is important to educate both tomorrow's leaders and today's rank and file workers in the industry.

Other environmental protection sectors (sewage systems, water treatment and distribution, land use planning, environmental engineering) all have extensive and mature training and certification programs. Local governments and those that do work for them routinely require environmental protection staff to have such certifications, yet this not typical of recycling and other SMM professionals.

Finding well trained professionals or the academic and professional training opportunities once they are hired are two of the many challenges confronting recycling programs in the less densely populated parts of the country. Particularly since many municipal recycling managers wear other hats, this regionally or state-based training is especially important.

*Recycling and SMM in Small Town America* Tens of millions live in the hinterlands of North America and they are too often underserved, not only from a training standpoint but from many other perspectives. It is crucial to the success of recycling and SMM that we recognize that collection resources, processing infrastructure and public educational programs are also deficient or absent from, not just rural regions, but many small cities and their suburbs. When I hear debates about the merit of single-stream recycling investments, I often chuckle that many of us outside the larger metropolitan areas would welcome any sort of recycling infrastructure investment.

*Building a SMM Tradition* Perhaps just as importantly, an ethic of SMM needs to be built among the public and elected officials across the country and at all levels – locally, within states and at the national level. Where recycling, reuse, composting and waste reduction have gained a foothold, a tradition has been built. Success is built upon previous success. Despite an incredible growth in recycling and other waste reducing practices at both work and home, we still generate massive amounts of waste and more than half of recyclable material ends up in landfills. Clearly, there are too many places where sound waste management practices (let alone zero waste goals) are not part of the culture.

As many in the recycling and SMM world have often said, we have come far but we have so much further to go.