



# 2017 Connecticut WRAP Campaign Report

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

## Introduction

In 2016, Connecticut began implementing a Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy designed to divert 60 percent of its waste from disposal by 2024 and to improve the performance of recycling programs. To help achieve these goals, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) collaborated with numerous partners on a statewide public outreach campaign to enhance the recycling of plastic bags, film, and wraps (aka “film packaging”<sup>1</sup>).

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 (collectively the WRAP Team). The CT WRAP campaign encouraged consumers to recycle film packaging at retail stores and to keep film packaging out of curbside recycling bins.

Connecticut’s campaign built on best practices and lessons learned in previous WRAP campaigns. WRAP campaigns are designed to leverage existing recycling infrastructure, which includes more than 20,000 drop off locations across the country, predominately at retail stores, to collect film packaging for recycling. The campaigns reach out to communities to help increase the amount and type of film packaging recycled.

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.)

In addition, various municipalities identified opportunities for their specific communities, such as promotion to Spanish speaking populations, new ways to collect film packaging, and partnerships with local retailers. For example:

- The Housatonic Resource Recovery Authority (HRRRA) and other communities such as Branford, North Branford, and Mansfield provided new access for residents and sometimes businesses to recycle film packaging at transfer stations or other municipal drop offs.
- Price Chopper, a CT WRAP partner, partnered with municipalities such as rural Mansfield—the community collects film packaging at its transfer station and hauls it to the local Price Chopper for final transfer to a recycling facility.
- In Middletown, volunteers inspect the collected film packaging before bringing it to their local Price Chopper, removing contaminants and capturing reusable bags that are used at community organizations such as the food pantry.



Image 1: Commissioner Robert Klee and Sherill Baldwin, CT DEEP, at CT WRAP launch event, February 2017

WRAP Team members met regularly via conference calls and worked on concurrent activities in various locations/communities/regions. Team members also reached out to each other on a peer-to-peer basis to exchange knowledge, expertise, and best practices.

***“This campaign created a great collaboration of state and industry resources with local initiatives implemented by municipalities.”***

—Sherill Baldwin, CT DEEP

Campaign goals included:

- increasing the *amount* of film packaging collected;
- improving the *quality* of film packaging collected;
- improving awareness among Connecticut residents, focused on the Greater Hartford area (see below), 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).

To achieve these goals, the WRAP campaign focused on three primary messages:

- Film packaging does *not* go in mixed recycling bins (at curbside or transfer stations)—instead it should be taken to participating retailers, such as Price Chopper, ShopRite, and local drop-off locations for recycling.
- Consumers can recycle many types of film packaging at participating stores and drop-offs.

- Film packaging is a valuable material and can be recycled into new products such as grocery bags, benches, and composite decking.

## Public Outreach

### Greater Hartford Area

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 built on lessons learned during similar WRAP campaigns conducted in [Milwaukee, WI, in 2015](#), in [Vancouver, WA, in 2016](#), and others.

The WRAP Team launched the campaign at a successful media event in February 2017 at the Middletown Price Chopper. The event included the co-chairs and members of the General Assembly’s Environment Committee, DEEP’s Commissioner, a U.S. EPA representative, food and plastics industry representatives, and various other Team members. The Team explained the campaign and displayed signage and examples of recyclable film packaging to educate the media and store customers. The event garnered widespread media coverage from the major network affiliates and local media outlets.

***“This campaign was able to leverage the lessons the plastics industry learned in past WRAP campaigns. The leadership from the state level and communication among stakeholders—willingness to listen to each other—created a very motivated Team.”***

—Marilynn Cruz-Aponte, East Hartford

The campaign followed up the launch event with a 10-week radio campaign focused on the GHA that generated 838,000 “impressions,” sponsored by Proctor & Gamble. In addition, East Hartford held a media event highlighting the CT WRAP campaign, supported by the local ShopRite store.

**Waterbury Recycling** is with CJ May.  
August 15, 2016 · 🌐

WRAP CHAMPION! I am delighted to be tapped to serve as “WRAP Champion” for Waterbury, promoting plastic bag recycling at our local Stop & Shop and ShopRite stores. If you have plastic shopping bags, and other plastics listed at <http://www.plasticfilmrecycling.org/s01/s01dropoff.html>, please recycle them! Please do not recycle them in your curbside recycling bin! #recycling #plastic #brasscitybuzz #municipalmagician #spokeswizard

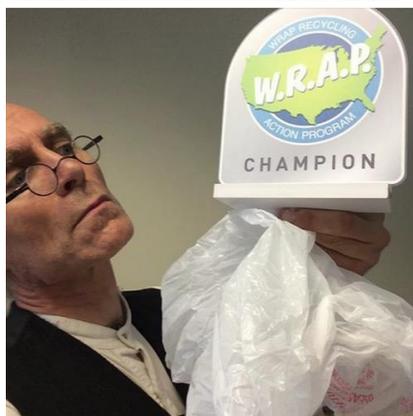


Image 2: Facebook post from Waterbury Recycling promoting the CT WRAP campaign

Team members also used their numerous social media channels to spread WRAP messaging. CT WRAP’s collective media outreach efforts, organized primarily by a local media consultant, resulted in significant and ongoing news coverage.

### Outside Greater Hartford Area

As noted above, various communities, government agencies, and regional organizations beyond the GHA organized efforts to educate residents and local businesses about how to properly recycle film packaging. For example, The City of Waterbury, which already had a wide range of retailers with bins in place, focused on increasing its outreach and education, in particular social media engagement.

*“Social media such as Facebook and Twitter really helped us magnify our ability to reach people in creative ways. A simple picture of recycling film packaging at a retail stores can be a powerful viral educational tool.”*

—CJ May, Waterbury

In addition, the Trex challenge—a program to engage schools and students in film packaging recycling—expanded significantly during the campaign.

## Campaign Results

Campaign results were gathered through:

- Material audits conducted by More Recycling (MORE);
- Material audits conducted by local government partners; and
- A consumer awareness survey conducted by Wakefield Research (Wakefield).

### Material Audits

#### *GHA Methodology*

MORE conducted material audits on bags of used film packaging collected at four Price Chopper stores in the GHA: Middletown, Southington, Bristol, and Windsor (selected by Price Chopper). Price Chopper, which has had a robust film packaging recycling program for many years, made no changes in customer education or signage on their store bins.

MORE examined only consumer-returned film packaging (no back-of-house material) as a baseline in February and then again in October following the public outreach campaign to gauge improvements in material quantity and quality, as well as changes in the mix of materials. The baseline and post-campaign collection bags (provided by The Trex Company) were colored and marked with the store number to distinguish them from other materials. MORE examined the bags at a resource recovery warehouse in Schenectady, NY.

#### *GHA Results*

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

- an 11 percent increase in the amount of plastic bags collected<sup>2</sup>;
- a seven percent increase in the amount of “other film” collected<sup>3</sup>; and

<sup>2</sup> E.g., grocery, retail, and produce bags only

<sup>3</sup> E.g., case wrap, product overwrap, bread bags, newspaper bags, etc.



Image 3: Plastic film recycling bin at East Hartford ShopRite

- a 23 percent decrease in contamination (non-film packaging).

There was very little contamination. The principal contaminants were store circulars, pet food bags, other recyclables, and general trash. Similar to results from 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 mentioned above led to a 100 percent increase in film packaging collected by the local ShopRite store.

*“The increase in recyclables and the low contamination rate should be encouraging to other retailers who are considering joining WRAP efforts. The success of this campaign should breed even more success statewide.”*

—Wayne Pesce, CT Food Association

NOTE: Because Connecticut has a bottle deposit system, the material audits found some wet plastic bags that were used to hold and return bottles to stores (these bags were not present in previous WRAP campaigns). Wet or dirty film packaging is not compatible with recycling. Future campaigns with similar deposit systems should consider education efforts to limit such contamination.

***Conclusion: a well-focused outreach campaign can help increase material quantity and improve quality.***

### ***Outside Greater Hartford Area***

Outside of the GHA, other communities established collection programs for film packaging. Of particular note:

- **Branford** began collection in September 2016 and each week sends an average of 100 pounds of film packaging from residents and small businesses, which are collected and baled at a MRF in Shelton, CT, for recycling.
- **Mansfield** began collection in late 2017 and takes approximately 100 pounds of film packaging to a local Price Chopper store for recycling every month.
- **North Branford** began collection in January 2017 and collected a total of 3,200 pounds of film packaging that year. Eight collection facilities send material to a local Big Y grocery store for recycling.
- **Deep River** conducted an audit of material collected over time and found an increase in recyclable materials and a decrease in contamination.



Image 4: Plastic film recycling bin at PriceChopper



Image 5: Plastic film recycling display at CT WRAP launch event at Price Chopper, February 2017

## Consumer Awareness Survey

### Methodology

Wakefield conducted a baseline survey in February 2017, prior to the campaign launch, that measured awareness of and participation in film recycling. The survey gathered results from 500 adults representative of the state population, including 146 in the Greater Hartford Area. Wakefield repeated the same survey during December 2017 and January 2018 using the same methodology to measure any post-campaign changes in awareness and participation.

### Results

The post-campaign survey found significant increases in awareness of proper plastic film recycling and types of plastic film that can be recycled, as well as stated participation in plastic film recycling in the GHA.

- Survey respondents who said they had “heard that certain plastics should be taken to grocery or retail stores to ensure proper recycling” increased nine percentage point (63 versus 54).
- Respondents who said they knew which film packaging items “are supposed to be taken to grocery or retail stores to ensure proper recycling” increased for nearly all listed items. For example, respondents identifying plastic bags increased 15 percentage points (63 versus 48), plastic bread bags by 17 points (28 versus 11), and plastic newspaper bags by 13 points (25 versus 13).\*
- Respondents who said that they “take plastic bags or plastic product wrappings to grocery or retail stores for recycling” either “most of the time” or “always/all of the time” increased by 10 percentage points (40 versus 30).\*

\* *Caveat: due to the small sample size of respondents for these questions, these findings are seen as directional and not definitive.*

As expected, since the campaign focused on the GHA, the survey did not find perceptible changes in these percentages at the statewide level.

**Conclusion: a well-focused outreach campaign can help increase awareness of and stated participation in plastic film recycling.**

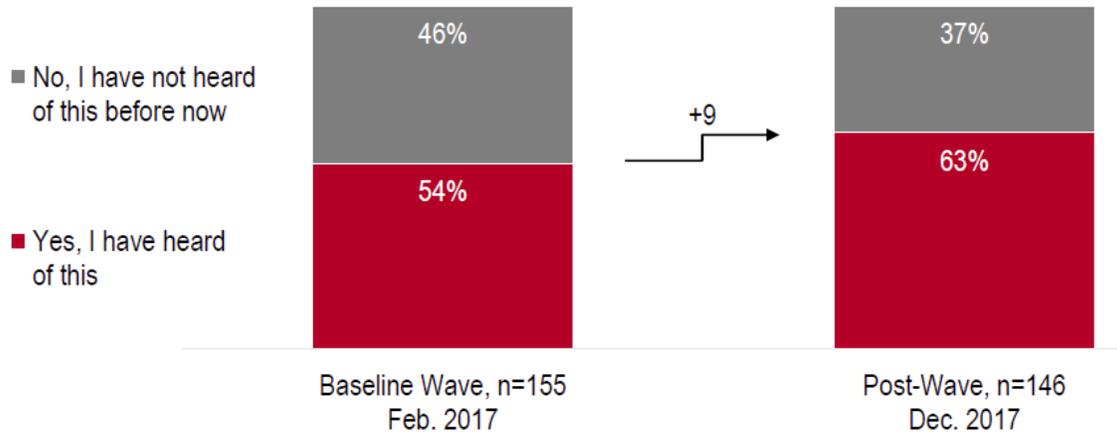


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who've heard that certain plastic items should be taken to grocery or retail stores to ensure proper recycling--GHA residents

### MRF Contamination

While one goal of CT WRAP campaign was to reduce contamination (film packaging erroneously placed in curbside bins instead of brought to retail stores) at MRFs, the WRAP Team was unable to obtain reliable metrics. Some anecdotal evidence indicated a reduction in contamination. This type of contamination is prevalent at MRFs across the country; WRAP participants continue to evaluate opportunities to measure post-campaign changes in contamination.

## WRAP Phase II: Increasing Markets for Recycled Plastics/Film Packaging



Image 6: Deck made out of composite lumber made with recycled plastic film. (Image provided by Trex.)

Following the successful campaign in 2017, the CT WRAP Team is developing a second phase of the campaign to expand its scope and focus, including increasing retail partners and emphasizing market demand for recycled plastics.

In 2017, China began restricting imports of used plastics collected for recycling, which has impacted recycling markets worldwide. As a result, U.S. communities now need

to find more domestic markets for used film packaging. As such, WRAP partners/programs have begun exploring ways to help increase markets for recycled polyethylene derived from used film packaging.

In Connecticut, Phase II WRAP campaign goals include:

- continuing existing efforts to increase the quantity and improve the quality of film packaging collected for recycling by increasing consumer awareness;
- expand the number of retail partners participating in the WRAP campaign;
- working with CT DEEP to facilitate markets for recycled polyethylene (PE) film (e.g., modifying procurement guidelines and encouraging local businesses and manufacturers to use recycled PE in products);
- expanding the Recycled Products Directory (under development at time of this Report) so consumers, businesses, and others can readily find products made with recycled plastics, including PE;
- creating incentives for businesses and communities to use recycled plastics, including PE; and
- highlighting businesses, communities, or organizations that use recycled PE.

## 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.

***“It’s time for us to help increase demand for products made with recycled plastic film. Because if companies, governments, and consumers aren’t buying recycled, then we’re not really recycling.”***

—Shari Jackson, Flexible Film Recycling Group, American Chemistry Council