Development of Recycling Education Resources

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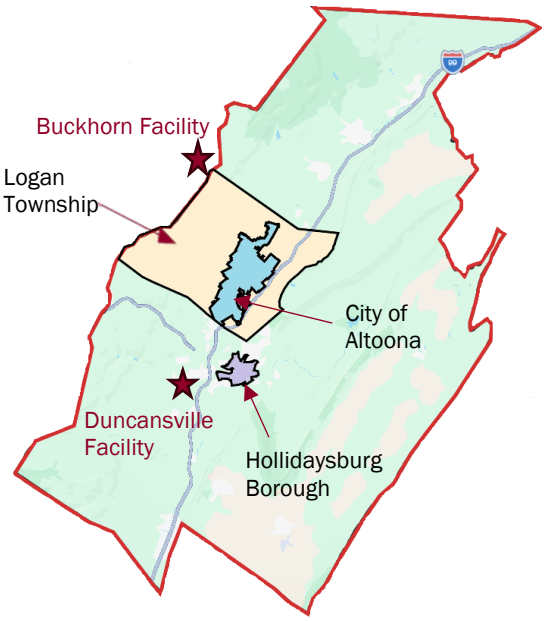
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1 BACKGROUND

The Intermunicipal Relations Committee (IRC) is a council of governments focused on waste diversion efforts in Blair County. The IRC includes three municipalities: the City of Altoona, Hollidaysburg Borough, and Logan Township. The three municipalities are identified in the image to the right and key characteristics of each community are listed in **Table 1**. All three municipalities are mandated recycling communities under the Pennsylvania Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Act (Act 101).



IRC municipalities in Blair County

Curbside recycling in Blair County utilizes the free market model, which allows residents to choose a private hauler to provide trash and recycling services. There are approximately 12 different haulers operating in the County providing solid waste and recycling services to residents.

Additionally, the IRC manages two drop-off facilities, Duncansville and Buckhorn, for residents and businesses to bring their recyclable materials. Both facilities are labeled on the map to the right (the Buckhorn facility is located on the outskirts of Logan Township in Dysart). To access the Duncansville facility residents and businesses are required to purchase a pass for a nominal fee. This facility is only open on Tuesdays. The Buckhorn facility is available to all County residents and is open every day of the week except Sunday and Wednesday.

Act 101 requires municipalities to educate residents on recycling at least two times per year. At least one of the educational materials being in print. Previously, the IRC educated residents on recycling using printed newsletters that were distributed to residents as well as their website to satisfy the public education requirements of Act 101. The IRC discontinued the use of printed newsletters to residents this year and is exploring other educational materials to communicate with residents and business about recycling. The IRC requests technical assistance to explore alternative recycling educational opportunities to help residents understand and properly participate in recycling activities in their communities.

Table 1. **IRC Member Communities - Key Characteristics**

Characteristic	City of Altoona	Hollidaysburg Borough	Logan Township
Land area (square miles)	9.79	2.33	46.51
Population (2020 Census)	43,963	5,641	12,413
Population (July 1, 2025 estimate)	42,347	5,470	12,147
Households	18,777	2,529	4,588
Persons per household	2.24	2.01	2.42
Owner-occupied households (%)	63.9%	66.8%	83.3%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts profiles for each municipality: 2020 Census, July 1, 2025 population estimates (V2025);), and 2020–2024 American Community Survey five-year estimates. Household, household-size, and homeownership are 2020–2024 estimates and are subject to sampling error. Households exclude vacant housing units.

2 SUMMARY OF WORK

The following summarizes the anticipated tasks and outcomes to complete this project.

Task 1 – Project Kick-off Meeting, Developing Scope of Work, and Data Request

The project kick-off meeting occurred virtually and included a discussion of the IRC's current education efforts and how technical assistance can improve their interactions with residents. SCS staff also prepared and sent a data request about diverted material quantities, existing educational materials, previous newsletters, hours and accepted materials at IRC drop-off facilities, contamination concerns, and private haulers operating in Blair County.

Task 2 – Review Existing Educational Materials

SCS reviewed the information provided by the IRC and incorporated key points and messages into new educational resources. Additionally, SCS reviewed existing educational materials and recommended improvements.

Task 3 – Draft Article

The activities completed as a part of Tasks 1 and 2 were used to draft a recycling article for publication in a local print publication. The article provides residents with information on recycling in the County that includes acceptable materials, material preparation instructions, and the recycling process. The article also focuses on common contaminants that should not be placed in recycling containers. Note that costs required to publish the article will not be paid for by the Recycling Technical Assistance/DEP project funds.

Task 4 – Develop Sticker/Magnet Design

The information and discussions held as a part of Tasks 1 and 2 were also used to develop a new educational resource, sticker/magnet, to promote recycling that is unique to the IRC service area. This educational resource focuses on informing residents of the recycling program options available to them and how to access these services. Additionally, the sticker/magnet includes a list of materials accepted for recycling in the County and common items that should not be placed in recycling containers. SCS staff created an image for the sticker/magnet that is visually appealing and includes the IRC logo.

Task 5 – Final Report

This report represents the final task of this project and includes the considerations, recommendations, and new educational resources made as part of Tasks 1 – 4, discussed above.

3 RESOURCES

CURRENT PROGRAM

Currently, curbside recycling in Blair County uses a free market model, which allows residents to choose one of 12 different haulers operating in the County to provide curbside trash and recycling services. Generally accepted curbside and drop-off recyclable materials are listed below. This information can also be found on the IRC's website (Blair County Recycling | Altoona, Logan Twp., Hollidaysburg).

Acceptable Recyclable Materials:

- #1 and #2 Plastic Bottles and Jugs
- Glass Bottles and Jars
- Steel and Aluminum Cans
- Newspapers and Inserts
- Magazines and Catalogs
- Phone Books
- Office Paper and Envelopes
- Junk Mail
- Shredded Paper
- Cardboard*
- Paperboard

**Cardboard boxes need to be flattened and bundled or flatten them and contain them in another box*

In addition to curbside services provided by private haulers and the County's drop-off collection program, Blair County provides the following additional waste diversion services to residents:

- Electronics/Appliances– Blair County residents can recycle electronics and appliances at the Buckhorn drop-off facility. Most items may be recycled without a fee; however, some items require a fee to cover special handling requirements.

- Household Hazardous Waste – The County hosts an annual household hazardous waste collection event for residents to properly dispose hazardous items. There is a nominal fee to participate in the annual event. Some hazardous materials are accepted at the Buckhorn drop-off facility.

- Yard Waste – The municipalities represented by the IRC all provide residents with municipal operated curbside collection of leaf and yard waste materials. The municipalities' collection programs operate independently and vary in collection frequency and material preparation requirements.

As discussed above, the IRC manages two drop-off facilities, Duncansville and Buckhorn, for residents and businesses to drop off their recyclable materials. This service is available to all residents of Blair County, including those in mandated municipalities (City of Altoona, Hollidaysburg Borough, and Logan Township) as well as those in non-mandated municipalities. Use of the Duncansville facility does require residents to have a membership and pay an annual fee. In addition to accepting traditional curbside collected recyclable materials, the drop-off facilities also accept additional items that are listed in the call-out boxes below.

Buckhorn Recycling and Composting Facility:

Additional Acceptable Recyclable Materials:

- Appliances
- Automotive Materials
- Electronics
- Fluorescent Light Bulbs
- Hardback Books
- Household Hazardous Waste
- Leaves, Grass, Lawn Trimmings
- Scrap Metal
- Used Motor and Cooking Oils
- Woody Waste, Brush, Branches

The facility does not accept paint, lumber, mattresses, or tires

Duncansville Recycling and Composting Facility*:

Additional Acceptable Recyclable Materials:

- Hardback Books
- Leaves, Grass, Lawn Trimmings
- Woody Waste, Brush, Branches

**Membership required*

The Duncansville facility is only open on Tuesdays for residents that have purchased a pass. The Buckhorn facility is available to County residents and is open every day of the week except Sunday and Wednesday. Both facilities are self-serve drop-offs and residents must be able to unload their own recyclables. Materials must be separated by type to prevent illegal dumping and reduce contamination. . Both Buckhorn and Duncansville are source-separated facilities whereby materials are baled and sold into markets for use as feedstocks in manufacturing. The protocol for keeping materials separate at these two facilities facilitates clean recycling with little to no contamination.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Best Practices for Educational Materials

The following best practices for educational materials were developed based on the SCS' experience providing technical assistance to recycling outreach programs.

- **Consistent** – Educational materials should use the same terminology, color cues, accepted-material lists, and preparation instructions across postcards, websites, facility signs, social media posts, and other outreach materials. Consistency is important because residents may receive recycling information from several different sources, including municipalities, haulers, and drop-off facilities. When those messages align, residents are less likely to receive conflicting guidance, which can reduce confusion,

improve confidence, and help limit contamination in recycling containers. Consistent use of colors to distinguish trash from recycling can also help residents quickly understand the intended action, especially when materials are viewed briefly.

- **Direct** – Educational materials should clearly state what residents should do, what materials are accepted, and which items should be kept out of the recycling stream. Direct language is important because residents are often making disposal decisions quickly at the cart, bin, or drop-off container. Avoiding industry jargon, acronyms, and overly technical explanations makes the message easier to understand and reduces the likelihood that residents will misinterpret program requirements. Clear calls to action also help residents connect the information to the specific behavior the program is trying to encourage.

- **Visual Appeal** – Educational materials should use clean layouts, readable graphics, and visually engaging design elements to support the written message. Visual appeal is important because residents are more likely to notice, keep, and use materials that are easy to read and attractive. Simple images of actual recyclable items can help residents recognize accepted materials more easily than symbols alone, particularly when there is uncertainty about product shape, packaging type, or preparation requirements. Effective visuals can also make outreach materials more useful for residents who may not carefully read long blocks of text.

- **Concise** – Educational materials should focus on the most important recycling instructions and avoid unnecessary details that do not directly support correct participation. Concise messaging is important because too much information can overwhelm residents and make it harder for them to identify the key actions they need to take. A short, focused message can be reviewed quickly, remembered more easily, and applied more consistently. This is especially important for materials such as postcards, stickers, magnets, cart tags, and signage, where space is limited and residents may only spend a few moments reviewing the information.

- **Accessible** – Educational materials should be designed so they can be understood by as many residents as possible, including people with varying levels of recycling knowledge, reading ability, language proficiency, and familiarity with local program requirements. Accessibility is important because recycling programs rely on broad participation from the entire community. Using plain language, clear visuals, adequate spacing, and easy-to-understand examples can help residents quickly determine the correct action. Visual aids are especially useful when English is not a resident's first language or when residents need to compare an item in their hand to the materials shown in the guidance.

Existing Educational Materials

As part of this project, SCS staff reviewed select educational materials distributed by the IRC. The first resource reviewed is a postcard that provides basic information about a household hazardous waste event and drop-off recycling at the Buckhorn and Duncansville facilities (**Exhibit 1**). Using the best practices described above, SCS identified effective characteristics and potential improvements. The evaluation is included in **Table 2**.

Exhibit 1. IRC HHW and Drop-Off Recycling Postcard



Table 1. HHW and Drop-Off Recycling Postcard Evaluation

Criteria	Effective Characteristics	Potential Improvements
Consistent	Uses one overall format and combines related program information in one outreach piece.	Use the same terminology, material names, facility details, hours, eligibility language, and visual cues across IRC postcards, website content, signage, and other outreach materials.
Direct	Provides actionable information about the Household Hazardous Waste event and the Buckhorn and Duncansville facilities.	Lead with one clear primary action and consider limiting the postcard to one main message so residents can quickly understand what they should do.
Visual Appeal	The postcard is functional and communicates practical program information.	Add graphics, icons, color, section dividers, and more white space to make the postcard easier to scan and more engaging.
Concise	Consolidates several useful details into one printed outreach item.	Reduce text, use short bullets, and move secondary details to the IRC website so the postcard focuses on the most important actions.
Accessible	Provides printed information for residents who may not rely on websites or social media.	Use plain language, larger text, stronger contrast, clear spacing, and simple visuals of accepted and prohibited items; consider multilingual callouts where appropriate.

The SCS Team also reviewed a postcard issued by the IRC that provides an overview of the Act 101 mandatory recycling requirements. Like with the first postcard, the postcard shown in **Exhibit 2** is informative about Act 101 and local municipal ordinance program requirements. This postcard focuses on the Act 101 requirements for commercial, institutional, and municipal facilities, making the intent clear and direct. However, the overall design of the postcard lacks visual appeal due to the absence of graphics. SCS recommends including graphics of the materials listed (aluminum cans, yard waste, corrugated cardboard, and office paper) to make the postcard more visually appealing and accessible to a broader range of demographics.

Exhibit 2. Act 101 Requirements Postcard



Table 2. Recycling Requirements Postcard Evaluation

Criteria	Effective Characteristics	Potential Improvements
Consistent	Uses the same postcard format as the first evaluated resource and maintains a focused topic: recycling requirements for commercial, institutional, and municipal facilities.	Align material names, terminology, and visual cues with other outreach. Distinguish state-required materials from additional local requirements.
Direct	Identifies the intended audience and explains that recycling is required, giving the message a clear purpose.	Lead with an action-oriented heading. Present a short checklist: identify applicable materials, arrange recycling service, and confirm additional municipal requirements.
Visual Appeal	A single-topic postcard provides a focused framework for presenting requirements.	Add labeled images of aluminum cans, cardboard, office paper, and leaf waste. Use clear headings, white space, and restrained color to separate required actions from background information.
Concise	Concentrates on requirements for a defined audience rather than combining unrelated services or events.	Replace explanations with short bullets. Retain who must act, what to recycle, and the next step; direct readers to supporting resources for detailed information.
Accessible	Provides a printed reference that does not require internet access to read the core message.	Use plain-language audience examples, readable text, strong contrast, and labeled visuals. Provide a phone contact and readable web address; do not rely on color or a QR code alone.

New Education Materials

The IRC requested additional public outreach materials that could inform its residents about what can and cannot be recycled. SCS staff wrote an article to be published in local print media. The article highlights recycling programs available, materials accepted, proper material preparation, and general recycling guidance. The article can be found in **Appendix A.**

SCS staff also developed a sticker/magnet for the IRC to further promote the recycling program. The sticker/magnet includes information about the recycling program, including a list of accepted materials, program details, and general guidance. The size (recommended 5” x 7”) and information included on the sticker/magnet was designed for residents to keep in a convenient and visible place, ideally near their in-house recycling container, as a quick reference guide to confirm residents

recycle the right materials and follow proper preparation instructions. Appendix B includes the sticker/magnet educational material developed.

4 CONCLUSION

This project provided the Intermunicipal Relations Committee (IRC) with updated recycling education resources designed to meet Act 101 requirements while improving the clarity, consistency, and reach of public messaging across IRC member communities City of Altoona, Logan Township, and Hollidaysburg Borough and other municipalities in the County. The article and sticker or magnet design give the IRC practical tools to communicate accepted materials, proper preparation practices, available recycling services, and common contaminants to avoid.

To maximize the value of these materials, the IRC should consider distributing them through multiple channels, including local newspapers, municipal websites, social media, community events, and direct outreach at its recycling drop-off facilities. The IRC should also periodically review and update the materials as program requirements, facility operations, accepted materials, and contamination concerns change. A coordinated and sustained education effort will help the member municipalities maintain Act 101 compliance, improve resident confidence, and support more consistent recycling participation throughout the service area.

Appendix A

Print Article

Recycle Right: How to Recycle in Blair County

October 2026



Recycling is beneficial to the environment and your community if done ***correctly***. The Intermunicipal Relations Committee (IRC) of Blair County supports recycling through the establishment of two convenient drop-off centers whereby residents can transport materials for recycling. Additionally, the IRC supports local haulers that provide curbside recycling services to residents through the blue bin recycling program.

Curbside Recycling

All private haulers operating in Blair County provide collection services for recyclable materials. Recyclable materials should be placed in your blue recycling bin and set out for collection on the day designated by your hauler. Materials accepted for recycling in your curbside recycling bin in Blair County include the following:



- #1 and #2 plastic bottles and jugs
- Clear, brown, green, and blue glass bottles and jars
- Aluminum cans
- Steel and tin cans
- Corrugated Cardboard
- Junk mail
- Magazines and catalogs
- Newspapers and inserts
- Office paper and envelopes
- Paperboard (cereal boxes, etc.)
- Phonebooks
- Shredded paper (contain in bag or box)

The following items should **NOT** be placed in your recycling container:

- Plastic bags (except when bagging shredded paper)
- Plastic tubs, trays, or cups
- Light bulbs
- Window glass
- Ceramic containers and cookware
- Waxed boxes (like milk cartons)
- Styrofoam packaging
- Pizza or food-covered boxes
- Tissues
- Napkins
- Paper towels
- Hardback books

Recyclable materials also require proper preparation before placement in the recycling container. Below are general preparation guidelines for recycling in Blair County:

- Cardboard boxes should be flattened and bundled or flattened and nested inside another box.
- All paper and cardboard should be kept dry.
- Rinse all food containers before placing them in the recycling bin. A quick rinse with warm water immediately upon emptying will typically remove most food debris.
- Do not place recyclable materials in plastic bags. Plastic bags may only be used for shredded paper.

Drop-Off Recycling

There are two drop-off centers run by the IRC, Buckhorn and Duncansville, for residents and businesses to bring their recyclable materials. These drop-off centers accept the materials that can be recycled in your curbside container (listed above).

Details on each of these facilities are included below:

Buckhorn Recycling and Compost Facility

1860 Blacksnake Road
Dysart, PA 16636

Hours:
Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri. – 10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Sat. – 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
(closed Wednesdays, Sundays, and most holidays)

In addition to accepting the materials listed above under curbside recycling, the Buckhorn facility also accepts the following:

- Appliances
- Automotive materials
- Electronics
- Fluorescent light bulbs
- Hardback books
- Household hazardous waste
- Leaves, grass, lawn trimmings
- Scrap metal
- Used motor and cooking oils
- Woody waste, brush, branches

Duncansville Recycling and Compost Facility (pass required)

16906 Dunnings Highway
Duncansville, PA 16635

Hours:
Tues. – 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm
In addition to accepting the materials listed above under curbside recycling, the Duncansville facility also accepts the following:

- Hardback Books
- Leaves, grass, lawn trimmings
- Woody waste, brush, branches

To ensure proper recycling at the two drop-off centers, materials must be separated and placed in the correctly labeled container. Recycling at these facilities is directly baled and sold to recycling markets, so separation is important to prevent contamination.

For more information, please call (814) 942-7472 or visit the IRC website: https://ircenvironment.org/.

Appendix B

Recycling Sticker/Magnet

RECYCLE RIGHT

Only place the following items in your recycling bin

✓ Empty ✓ Clean ✓ Dry

Paper & Cardboard



- Cardboard (flatten)
- Paperboard (cereal boxes, etc.)
- Newspapers and inserts
- Magazines and catalogs
- Office paper, envelopes, junk mail
- Shredded paper (contain in box or bag)

Bottles & Cans



- #1 and #2 plastic bottles and jugs
- Glass bottles and jars
- Aluminum cans
- Steel and tin cans

Intermunicipal Relations Committee

Please call (814) 942-7472 or visit www.ircenvironment.org for more information.