

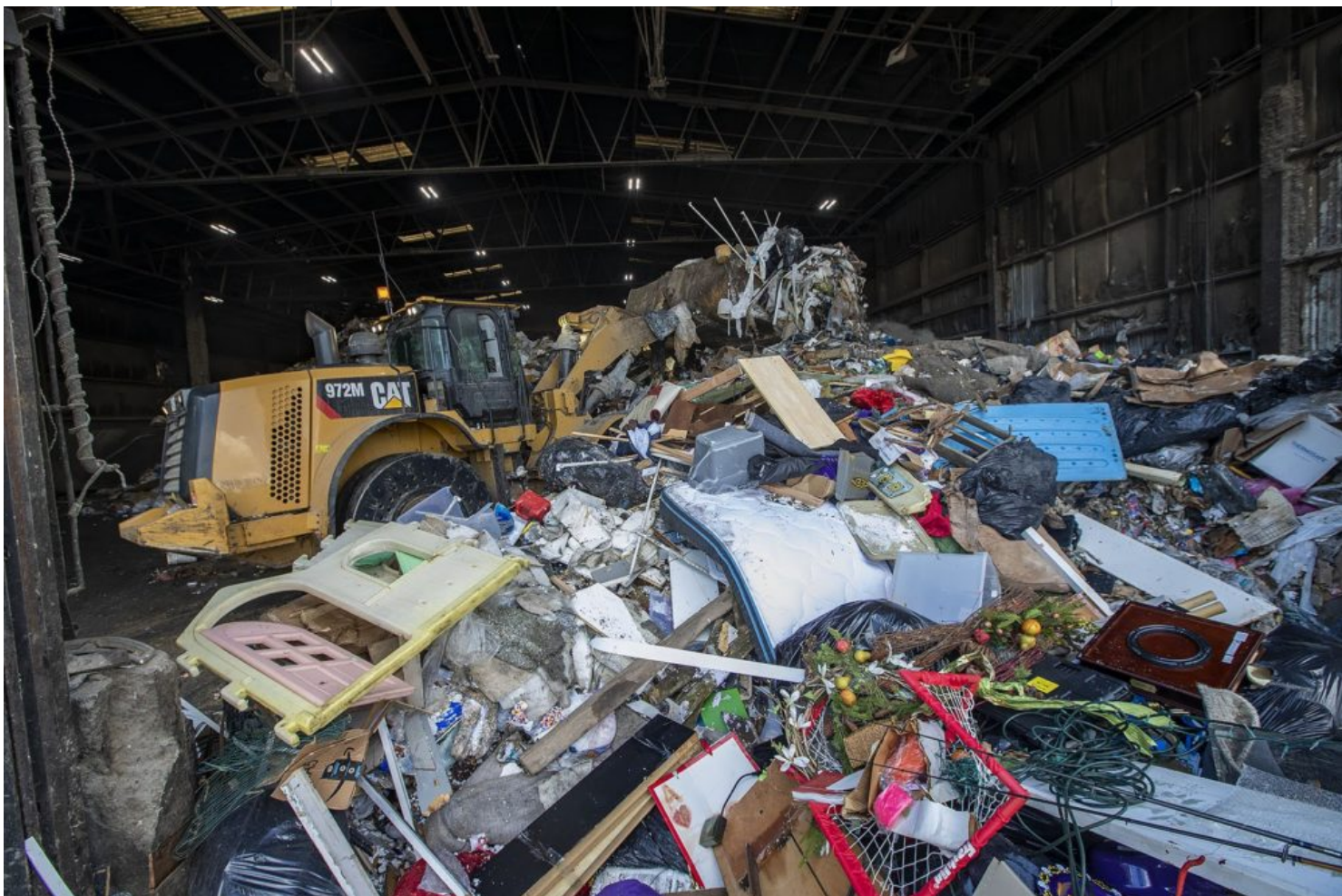
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Report: Banned waste filling state landfills, incinerators

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By Sam Drysdale, State House News Service



A landmover pushes a 1,000-ton pile of trash into the rear of a warehouse at E.L. Harvey and Sons in Westborough. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

A coalition of environmental organizations under the name Zero Waste Massachusetts released a report Thursday morning that examines the effectiveness of



The state Department of Environmental Protection implemented waste ban rules in 1990, prohibiting materials such as paper, cardboard, glass, metal and wood from being deposited into landfills and incinerators, which can lead to pollution and public health problems.

But the coalition's new [report](#) claims that banned materials account for about 40% of the waste burned and buried in Massachusetts. The state disposed of 5.5 million tons of waste in 2019, and the report says more than 2 million tons of waste could have been recycled instead.

Massachusetts has only six landfills — and almost all are due to reach capacity by 2030, according to Keep Massachusetts Beautiful, a Keep America Beautiful affiliate focused on waste reduction and recycling.

"The bottom line is: this should not be hard," said Elizabeth Saunders of Clean Water Action, which is one of the Zero Waste Massachusetts organizations. "There are many environmental problems that are incredibly complicated to solve, but this is straightforward. We could drastically reduce waste in Massachusetts by doing the basics – enforcing the long established DEP waste bans."

The report, which was released Thursday morning, compares the implementation of Massachusetts' ban to three municipalities — the island of Nantucket here in Massachusetts and the cities of Seattle and San Francisco — and one state, Vermont.

Nantucket developed strict waste bans in 1995. Among other strategies, the town banned traditional curbside trash bins. The Department of Public Works requires residents and waste haulers to separate waste into three streams: recycling, compost and other waste, stored in separate bins. In addition, the DPW requires that all waste be disposed of in clear bags, which makes inspections of disposed waste easier, the report says.

In 2018, the most recent reporting year, 12% of what ended up in Nantucket landfills consisted of banned materials, compared to the 40% statewide.



Based on the study results, Zero Waste Massachusetts recommended that MassDEP better enforce the state's ban.

The coalition called on the state agency to require waste haulers to inspect trash bins and issue warnings and financial penalties for noncompliance. The state should also devote more resources to waste ban inspections by hiring additional inspectors whose sole job is to enforce the bans, according to another recommendation.

Using Nantucket's policies as reference, the coalition also recommends mandating the use of clear trash bags and instituting waste stream separation. Another important piece of their strategy is a multilingual public education campaign, which the report says will help all residents understand the MassDEP regulations.

MassDEP did not respond to requests for comment about its waste ban enforcement in time for publication.

Executive director of MASSPRIG, Janet Domenitz, said the report was just the beginning of a process of working with MassDEP and lawmakers to better enforce the bans.

"If you walk down the street and ask 10 people if they know what items are banned from disposal in Massachusetts, maybe one of them will know," she said. "We can't fix what we don't recognize. This is our first step in outreach to everyone from the DEP to lawmakers and everyday people."

Domenitz said Zero Waste Massachusetts wants to meet with MassDEP to discuss their recommendations, and plans to organize a webinar on the topic. Domenitz herself is on the Solid Waste Advisory Committee at the department, and said she will bring up the results of the report at their next meeting.

Additionally, she said the timing of November's upcoming election provides the coalition with the opportunity to "reach the next group of decision makers in Massachusetts and make sure they pay attention to this issue."



recycled harms our environment and health, adds to climate change, and is literally throwing away our tax dollars which subsidize disposal. We need enforcement of these bans, and we need a more ambitious plan to make Massachusetts a zero waste state."

Zero Waste Massachusetts is made up of the Conservation Law Foundation, Clean Water Action, Community Action Works and MASSPIRG.

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