



Watch OCRRA! Explore our Growing Video Library

Sometimes the best way to understand how something works is to SEE it in action! OCRRA's video library is expanding on YouTube. Let us show you recycling rules and tips for composting. Find teacher resources or tour our facilities. Hit "subscribe" to keep tabs on new uploads. Ready to start exploring? Click the playlists tab on www.youtube.com/@ocrra to find several videos for each topic listed below.

1. RECYCLING TIPS

Our colorful cast of characters (milk jug, sour cream tub, etc) offer brief animated reminders about recycling rules in Onondaga County. Entertaining tips from the googly-eyed group teach us that recyclables never belong in bags and not all plastics are recyclable. This is a great way to learn which items do and do NOT belong in a curbside recycle bin.



2. OCRRA IN THE CLASSROOM

Teach students about recycling, waste reduction, composting, waste-to-energy and other ways to save the world a little each day. Combined with materials on OCRRA.org, these activities fit into NYS curriculum requirements for grades 3-5, so teachers can easily integrate them into lesson plans. See pages 4-5 of this newsletter for more details.



3. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Follow food waste from the Food Bank of Central New York to the Amboy Compost Site, where a worker from Arc of Onondaga prepares it for the compost pile. Revisit the 2023 Earth Day Litter Cleanup, then see how homeless individuals earn money cleaning up litter (details on page 7). Great solid waste management starts with community connections.



4. OCRRA OPERATIONS

Watch recyclables get sorted at a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and learn why it's so important to keep items loose in your curbside bin. See how food waste is delivered and reused at OCRRA's Amboy Compost Site. If you want to know where trash goes in Onondaga County, this is your playlist! Our video archives are packed full of great information.



5. END FOOD WASTE (MULTIPLE LANGUAGES)

Almost 40% of the U.S. food supply is wasted every year. Food scraps NEVER belong in your recycle bin. But, too much food waste in the trash clogs up our waste stream. Get tips on meal planning, composting, and understanding use by, sell by, and best by dates on food. These videos are presented in multiple languages to help more of our neighbors reduce waste.



6. ASK OCRRA

How much compost belongs in your garden? What's the difference between compost and dirt? What's the best way to mulch around a tree? In the Ask OCRRA playlist, we're answering some common questions. If a picture is worth a thousand words, video offers an even better way to SHOW you how to mix compost into your soil.



Save the Date: Saturday, 9/16 - Mercury Collection Event

Maria Bianchetti, Recycling Specialist

Nearly every home has items containing mercury, including some thermometers and thermostats. They never belong in the trash. If not properly managed, mercury can harm humans and the environment. Coming up on Saturday, September 16, OCRRA and Covanta are hosting a mercury take back event from 8-11 a.m. at Miller Environmental Group on 524 State Fair Boulevard in Syracuse. Covanta, which operates the local Waste-

to-Energy Facility, is donating a \$10 Lowe's gift card to every resident who brings in a mercury thermometer or thermostat. One gift card will be offered, per resident drop-off, regardless of the number of mercury items turned in. If a thermometer is dropped off, Covanta will provide a mercury-free digital thermometer replacement. This free event is for household items from Onondaga County only. Business items are not accepted.

How can you tell if your thermometer or thermostat contains mercury? Mercury thermometers have SILVER, METALLIC GREY, or BLACK filling in their bulbs. Any other color filling indicates it is a non-mercury thermometer and it should be thrown in the trash. Mercury thermostats have dials or levers that you need to manually adjust. If you take off the faceplate and see one or more glass vials containing a silver substance, you have a mercury thermostat.



Residents should sign up for a drop-off time at www.tinyurl.com/Mercury2023. If you are unable to register online, complete the drop-off form below and place it on your dashboard before the event.

Mercury Therm Drop-Off Event Form

Complete this form in advance.

Place it on your vehicle's dashboard on the day of the event (9/16).

Name:

Street:

Town: Zip Code:

Phone:

Email*:

*By providing your email address you are confirming that you want to be on OCRRA's email list (which keeps you up-to-date on OCRRA's services and upcoming events). You may unsubscribe at any time.

Signature: _____

Number of THERMOMETERS Dropped Off:

Number of THERMOSTATS Dropped Off:



Unable to make the September 16 event?

Search www.thermostat-recycle.org to find a thermostat drop-off location near you. OCRRA's free Household Hazardous Waste drop-off program accepts thermometers that contain mercury IF they are dropped off with other household toxics as well. Visit www.ocrra.org/toxics to see the list of acceptable items and make an appointment (required) with Miller Environmental Group in Syracuse, at least 24 hours in advance. This free service is for residents only; business materials are not accepted.

Maria Bianchetti can be reached at mbianchetti@ocrra.org

Mondays and Fridays:
8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Thursdays:
8 a.m. to noon

The first Saturday of the month
8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

FACT: Mercury, a neurotoxin, can contaminate lakes and accumulate in the tissues of fish due to improper disposal.

How Do I Get Rid of Electric Bike Batteries?

Maria Bianchetti, Recycling Specialist

Batteries used to power electric mobility (commonly referred to as e-mobility) devices, including e-bikes, e-scooters and hoverboards should NEVER go in your curbside trash or recycle bin. E-mobility batteries are rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, which means they can be charged and reused several times with proper safety and care.

When you upgrade your bike or do not need the battery anymore, they require special end-of-life management. Putting these items in the trash or a recycle bin could lead to dangerous fires that can harm solid waste workers and damage equipment. These batteries are different (and potentially more dangerous) than other commonly used household batteries and are NOT accepted in OCRRA's household battery collection bins at area Wegmans and other drop-off locations.

Syracuse Bicycle accepts most e-mobility batteries. Call (315) 446-6816 to confirm if they'll accept the battery you have before dropping it off. Syracuse Bicycle is located at 2540 Erie Blvd. East in Syracuse.

Many manufacturers accept their own e-mobility batteries for recycling. Explore take back programs by going to www.tinyurl.com/E-BikeBatteries. Contact the manufacturer directly for instructions on proper battery management.

Most e-mobility batteries are "dry" lithium-ion batteries. They are not sealed lead acid batteries, like those found in cars or toy vehicles such as Power Wheels. A "dry" e-mobility battery can be dropped off with other household toxics when you make an appointment for OCRRA's Household Hazardous Waste Drop-Off program at ocrra.org/hhw.

To keep these potentially dangerous batteries out of the waste stream, OCRRA encourages the New York State Legislature to add e-mobility batteries to the existing rechargeable battery law. For more information about household battery management, visit www.ocrra.org/batteries.

Maria Bianchetti can be reached at mbianchetti@ocrra.org



Photo Credit: iStock/Thomas Zsebok



Recycling Rhoda

Unused Medication

Dear Rhoda,

While cleaning out my medicine cabinet, I noticed it is time to get rid of several old prescriptions and over-the-counter pills. How do I get rid of them?

— Cleaner in Camillus

Dear Cleaner,

Thanks for this important question! Unused medication has been linked to concerning environmental and health issues across the country, when not carefully managed.

Do NOT flush medications down the toilet or dump them in a drain. Wastewater treatment plants don't have the capacity to routinely filter out various medications. Fish, birds and other wildlife are harmed when pharmaceuticals enter rivers and lakes.

There are several ways to properly dispose of unused medication. Police departments in Baldwinsville, Cicero, Geddes, Jordan, Manlius, Marcellus and North Syracuse have collection programs. Always be sure to call in advance to make sure the programs are still active when it is time for you to make a trip.

Last year, New York State approved proposals for two drug take back programs. You can search locations by zip code at [\[TakeBackNewYork.org\]\(http://TakeBackNewYork.org\). According to the NYS Health Department, all manufacturers that sell medication in this state must participate and pay for the costs of the programs. Eventually, the goal is to provide medication drop boxes and mail-back options in certain chain pharmacies and other locations throughout the state.](http://www.Med-</p>
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The United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is also holding a National Prescription Drug Take Back Day on October 28. Can't make it to any of the drop-off sites? Disguise medication by mixing it with coffee grounds or rotten food scraps and put it in the trash where it is safely combusted at over 2,000 degrees and converted into electricity.

Getting rid of unused prescriptions as soon as possible can help combat drug abuse and addiction. In a 2021 national survey, 8.7 million people reported that they had misused prescription pain relievers. The drugs are often obtained from the home medicine cabinets of family and friends. Cleaning out your cabinet is safer for you and your family, as well as the fish, birds and other wildlife that make our community a more beautiful place to live.

Yours truly,

Recycling Rhoda

OCRRA in the Classroom

Download our free resources for teachers

Lisa Piering, Recycling Specialist

Teaching children about environmental topics can establish a lifelong sense of responsibility to our community and the planet. But, with so much at stake, where do you start? OCRRA's education program is designed to help teachers navigate the world of waste management in Onondaga County. Several of the activities meet New York State's curriculum requirements for grades 3-5, so teachers can easily fit them into lesson plans.

We've done the homework! Visit www.tinyurl.com/OCRRALessons to download a collection of activities that teach students about recycling, waste reduction, composting, waste-to-energy and other ways to save the world a little each day. The program offers several options to integrate those topics into vocabulary, math, history lessons and more.

There are easy ideas, homework handouts and tests (with answer keys). Download videos to show during class or stream them online. Did you read about our growing YouTube video library on the cover of this newsletter? It includes a section for teachers. Take a look at our OCRRA in the Classroom playlist on YouTube, below.

Recycling specialists are available for interactive presentations, tailored to your classroom topics and grade level (kindergarten through graduate school). School-wide presentations are also an option. From science to civics lessons, we can help the next generation understand their power to make a positive impact on the world!



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

SUNY ESF's Summer Science Week at the MOST visits OCRRA's Amboy Compost Site where Engineer Cristina Albuño shows students compost that is still warm from the natural breakdown of organic material (see Page 8 for details).

OCRRA in the Classroom

▶ Play all ↻ Shuffle

These five short videos give educators a great tool to teach students of all ages about the local history of waste management, recycling, composting, reducing waste, and trash disposal.



Overview:
What is OCRRA and how do we operate in Onondaga County?

Composting:
Learn how composting helps gardens and mirrors natural cycles.

Recycling:
Begin building good environmental habits with classroom recycling.

Reduction:
Reduce and reuse lessons make great class projects.

Trash:
Household waste doesn't just get "thrown away". Where does it go?



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

Students from Blessed Sacrament Elementary School in Syracuse learn how to recycle with a fun relay race at the Paine Branch Library. Each “runner” had to quickly figure out if their item should be dropped in the trash or the recycle bin.



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

OCRRA Recycling Specialist Lisa Piering visits the town of Dewitt Summer Day Camp to show kids what does and does not belong in the recycle bin. Piering also explained how reducing waste and reusing items can help save our planet’s natural resources.

Pop Quiz! What kind of recycler are you?

Test your knowledge of Onondaga County’s recycling guidelines

Which types of paper belong in your curbside recycle bin? Are you sure you picked the three correct answers? Find out just how much you know about local recycling rules with OCRRA’s new online quiz.







With only 10 questions, this is a fun and easy way to brush up on our guidelines and teach children or grandchildren about the importance of recycling correctly. Results and explanations are instantly revealed after each question is answered. At the end, you’ll find out if you rank as a gold star recycler, a wishcycler or a contaminator (reviewing our rules at OCRRA.org can help a contaminator get that gold star status on the next quiz)!

Guessing what belongs in your curbside recycle bin causes contamination in bales of otherwise good recyclables. Following local guidelines helps reduce the overall cost of recycling and saves natural resources for future generations.

If you opt-in to share your email and results with us at the end of the quiz, OCRRA can review the information to learn more about the rules that residents in Onondaga County may need more help remembering.

You’ll also be added to our mailing list for great information about upcoming events and important announcements. We will not clog up your inbox and you can unsubscribe anytime. Ready to test your knowledge? Find OCRRA’s new recycling quiz at www.OCRRA.org/Quiz.

Which types of paper belong in your

		
junk mail	softcover books	hardcover books
		
frozen food boxes	shredded paper	cereal boxes

FACT: Paperboard boxes that go in the refrigerator (butter box) or freezer (frozen pizza) don’t belong in the recycle bin.

Waste-to-Energy Facility FAQs

Cristina Albunio, PE Agency Engineer

Q: What waste goes to the WTE Facility?

A: You might be surprised to learn that every bag of curbside trash collected in Onondaga County goes to the Waste-to-Energy (WTE) Facility on Rock Cut Road in Jamesville. That’s also the destination for trash from local schools, hotels, recreational facilities, shopping centers and businesses. At times, a pit that runs 90 feet deep inside the large blue building is filled with discarded items that local municipalities or private haulers collect in their trucks.

Q: What waste cannot go directly to the WTE Facility?

A: With robust engineering controls, trash is safely converted into electricity through combustion at the WTE Facility. However, it is important to sort C&D (construction and demolition) debris first. For example, bricks and concrete cannot be combusted. Gypsum wallboard should not be combusted because it produces significant amounts of acid gases. Some items, such as furniture, are simply too large to pass through the system. Reducing and reusing what could become waste should be a priority in every home and business. Materials placed in the recycle bin will be taken to a sorting facility, not the WTE plant. OCRRA also has a program to manage household hazardous waste, which should not be put in the trash (visit OCRRA.org/toxics for drop-off details).

Q: How does the WTE Facility work with landfills to manage the community’s solid waste?

A: Each year, more than 360,000 tons of trash passes through the WTE Facility in Onondaga County. The benefits include effective and efficient energy recovery, approximately 260,000 megawatt-hours per year. That’s enough to power roughly 30,000 households. Since the volume and weight of our solid waste is reduced significantly during combustion, our community doesn’t rely heavily on landfills outside of the county for trash disposal. However, residue from the energy recovery process (known as municipal combustor ash) must be managed within a landfill, where it can be beneficially reused to cover the landfill at the end of each day. There is currently no other beneficial use for the ash in New York. OCRRA is hopeful that engineers of the future will discover more options, so New York State’s finite landfill space can be preserved.

Cristina Albunio can be reached at calbunio@ocrra.org



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

The trash pit fills up as haulers drop off loads at the Waste-to-Energy Facility on Rock Cut Road in Jamesville.

Adopt a Block



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

OCRRA Executive Director Kevin Spillane opens a trash bag for recycling specialist Maria Bianchetti as they pick up litter during the 2023 Syracuse Adopt-a-Block kickoff event.

There are so many ways to help clean up our community beyond Earth Day. Members of OCRRA’s staff proudly grabbed gloves and trash bags to help Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh launch the city’s 2023 Adopt-a-Block program. Friends, neighbors, coworkers or individuals can sign up to help beautify a small section of the city throughout the year. Volunteers commit to litter pick-up once a month, or as needed, for at least two city blocks.

This community connection, in coordination with Onondaga County’s Save the Rain Connect the Drops program, is helping keep litter out of sewer systems and waterways. Teams in Syracuse can visit www.syr.gov to find registration information. If you live in another municipality, consider asking your neighbors to get together for a cleanup day each month.

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From the Executive Director's Desk...

Seeking Higher Ground

Kevin Spillane, Executive Director, OCRRA

The most important things I have learned in all my 60 years can be attributed to my grandmother. In the few years I was fortunate enough to spend with her, she taught me about life and how to treat others. One lesson that has resonated with me for my entire life is that people are proud, regardless of their circumstances. Just because they ask for a helping hand, doesn't mean they want a handout.

I have tried to infuse that philosophy into my everyday life and my professional life. When I can make a difference in someone's life, I try to do something meaningful for them, myself or the organizations I have worked with over the years. Grandma's life lesson resurfaced recently with an opportunity for OCRRA to work with Hire Ground, a program that helps homeless individuals looking for work.

Each week, panhandlers and people living in homeless shelters can choose to work for a day. They'll get a ride to the site, meet with a case-worker and have lunch. Through a grant provided by Onondaga County, the workers also earn a stipend. Hire Ground was started by the same folks who run In My Father's Kitchen, a non-profit service that provides outreach to people living on the streets.

We ran across Hire Ground when they showed up at Rock Cut Road, near OCRRA's transfer station, and began to pick up litter. With haulers and residents delivering trash to the area every day, litter is an ongoing challenge. OCRRA has staff dedicated to daily litter collection, but there is always more that can be done. While thanking the team from Hire Ground for their efforts, it



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

Workers with the Hire Ground program earn a stipend by cleaning up litter near OCRRA's Rock Cut Road Transfer Station in Jamesville.

became clear that we had made a special connection. Not only could we help homeless individuals in Onondaga County find work, but they could also supplement OCRRA's regular litter

cleanup and help all of us enjoy a cleaner community.

I've tried to infuse the following philosophy into the work we do at OCRRA: If there is a way for us to make a positive difference while carrying out our mission of sustainable solid waste management, we should embrace those solutions. Since that first encounter, Hire Ground has been visiting OCRRA's facilities to clean up litter a couple of times a month. In turn, I buy their lunches (instead of using agency funding) and make sure all the folks helping us that day get to choose what they eat, which isn't always an option at other sites.

My grandmother taught me to treat everyone with respect, regardless of their circumstances. There is value and dignity through an honest day's work. I see the difference Hire Ground has made for the men and women who have been fortunate enough to jump into their van and accept a helping hand.



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

Homeless individuals are provided with transportation to sites throughout Onondaga County, where they can earn pay, meet with a social worker, have lunch and get work experience.



Meet a few members of the Hire Ground crew!

Visit www.YouTube/@OCRRA, click on the Community Connections playlist and you'll find a short video highlighting this special effort with Hire Ground. Check out the cover of this newsletter for more information about our growing video library.

Fall is a great time to protect soil with mulch

Lisa Piering, Recycling Specialist

For those of us who enjoy gardening, it can feel like we've run out of ways to play in the yard by fall. But, applying mulch this time of year can cover and protect soil over the winter. OCRRA's mulch is made with shredded woody materials. You may notice others applying fallen leaves, compost, shredded rubber, tumbled glass or gravel as mulch. Before you pick an option, consider the advantages of using material that breaks down.



Photo Credit: OCRRA, 2023.

Mulch that naturally breaks down will insulate soil during our harsh winter months and improve soil structure.

Carbon-based mulches, such as leaves, compost and wood chips slowly decompose and improve soil structure, providing plenty of space for air, water and roots to work their magic. They also help the soil absorb and store carbon, instead of emitting it into the atmosphere. Since there is an unhealthy balance of carbon dioxide in the air due to the burning of fossil fuels, this is a small way your yard can help save the world a little each day.

Why mulch in the fall? Plants need nitrogen, but the element gets pulled from the soil when large volumes of organic materials are actively breaking down. Mulching now will give the process enough time to mellow out and restore nitrogen levels for your plants in the spring. Adding a 1–2-inch layer of compost on the surface of your garden (top dressing) adds ingredients that the micro-ecosystem in your soil will turn into plant food.

Mulch also acts like an insulator. Just like a thermos keeps drinks hot or cold, mulch helps plants weather fluctuations in air temperature without feeling shocked. If you add mulch in the spring, it is best to wait until the soil has warmed up. Otherwise, just like a thermos, mulch will insulate and prolong the cold below ground.

Consider this: OCRRA's shredded mulch is made from woody yard waste dropped off by people from all over Onondaga County. By turning that waste into a product that you can use on your garden, you're helping us create a sustainable cycle (or closed loop system) that returns our organic waste back to the ground. As you harvest the last of your veggies or plant your mums, mulching is a great reason to play in the yard one more time before winter arrives.

Lisa Piering can be reached at lpiering@OCRRA.org

Buy OCRRA's Mulch

- **Trunk Loads:** (Double Ground Mulch only) Car, van and SUV owners can load their trunk for \$5.
- **Bulk Double Ground Mulch:** OCRRA loads a truck or trailer for \$13/cubic yard.
- **Bulk Triple Ground Mulch:** OCRRA loads a truck or trailer for \$15/cubic yard.

Residential Hours

Through November 18

Amboy Compost Site

6296 Airport Road
Camillus

Monday – Saturday
7:30 am – 3:30 pm

Jamesville Compost Site

4370 Route 91
Jamesville

Thursday – Saturday
7:30 am – 3:30 pm

Mark Your Calendar

MERCURY COLLECTION

SAT., SEPTEMBER 16
MUST REGISTER

See page 2 for details

COMMUNITY DROP-OFF EVENTS

OPTIONS BEYOND OCRRA
FOR ELECTRONICS,
SHREDDING, ETC.

www.tinyurl.com/CollectionEvents

NATIONAL DRUG TAKE BACK

SAT., OCTOBER 28
UNUSED MEDICATION
DROP-OFF

www.tinyurl.com/DEA2023

JAMESVILLE COMPOST SITE

CLOSES FOR THE SEASON
NOVEMBER 19

Reopens in Spring 2024

FACT: Never put food in a recycle bin. Reuse meal scraps in a compost pile. If that's not possible, throw them away.