Polypropylene Recycling Coalition

IMPACT IN PROGRESS

# Capturing More Polypropylene—and Inviting the Community to Join In

## Scott County, Iowa: Case Study

For the past eight years, the Waste Commission of Scott County in Iowa has operated a single-stream materials recovery facility (MRF), meaning all recyclables arrive mixed together and must be separated. Polypropylene has been in that mix, but only a small fraction of it was being processed.

**"We were seeing polypropylene coming through our lines, and we weren't capturing nearly enough because we just didn't have the staff," said Bryce Stalcup, executive director of the commission. "We went to The Recycling Partnership because we saw that there was a gap in our system."**

A 2023 grant from the Polypropylene Recycling Coalition helped support an optical sorter—a machine that can recognize polypropylene among recyclables much more quickly and reliably than the human eye can—and the purchase of a bunker to store its collection of polypropylene. The sorter enabled a huge leap in the amount of polypropylene Scott County can ship to interested buyers—from about 90,000 pounds in fiscal year 2023 to over 634,000 pounds in the first half of 2024 alone.

Adding optical sorters allowed the facility to move workers into quality control positions. "It was a move to put our staff in safer, more desirable positions and capture more material as it comes through our facility," Stalcup said. The MRF serves 185,000 households in Scott County and 25 surrounding counties. Before the coalition grant, polypropylene recycling was not uniformly promoted throughout these communities. There was a need to highlight the improved capacity for polypropylene recycling and educate residents with messaging about polypropylene acceptance.

To spread the word, the Waste Commission invested in education campaigns, including a direct mailer with pictures showing examples of recyclable polypropylene such as yogurt and butter tubs. This also helped to reinforce previous regional recycling improvements to nearby communities that send their recyclables to the Scott County MRF. Grants from The Partnership to Iowa City in 2018 and Coralville in 2024 provided recycling carts and education to residents, improving access to nearly 100,000 people.

"With the Coalition grant, we were able to do outreach a little bit beyond Scott County," said Megan Fox, communications and human resources manager at the commission. In addition to the mailer the commission put out messaging on buses, billboards, and via videos that run on YouTube and cable networks. One YouTube video is a virtual MRF tour that has received 1,600 views over eight months.

Stalcup says the investment in sourcing and handling polypropylene, along with new connections to buyers made through The Recycling Partnership, is paying off: "We're capturing more polypropylene than we thought we would."

**Click here to learn more about the Coalition and download the 2024 Polypropylene Annual Report.**