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Social Enterprise Zero Waste Group Beats Multinationals in Twin Cities Recycling Contracts

What does it take to go up against the industry giant Waste Management (WMX) for the two biggest recycling contracts in Minnesota (the cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis) and win? For Eureka Recycling, which just accomplished this feat, it took a commitment to its core values as a zero waste, mission driven organization.

Eureka Recycling was created in 2001 when rapid consolidation in the recycling industry resulted in unwarranted rising prices for residential recycling. At that time, WMX planned to increase costs for both recycling collection and processing in Saint Paul by 40 percent. “We worked with the city of Saint Paul to keep recycling stable by creating Eureka to collect and process their materials, educate the community and advocate for recycling and now, 15 years later we have demonstrated that, by consistently recycling with genuine care for people and the planet, we are in the best position to help both Saint Paul and Minneapolis get to zero waste.” said Tm Brownell, co-President of Eureka Recycling.

Mirroring their success of more than a decade and a half ago, Eureka Recycling recently secured five-year contracts that will help support both cities to reach their zero waste goals by providing the best pricing and reliable marketing agreements without sacrificing people’s health or the environment. “We stayed true to our mission to demonstrate that waste (and all the associated environmental, economic, and social injustices that result) is completely preventable,” explained Brownell.

Together these two city contracts will deliver over 46,000 tons of recyclable materials to Eureka’s Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Minneapolis where one of the biggest differences in Eureka Recycling’s approach shows up for work every day. In an industry where the unfortunate practice of employing part-time, temporary workers in the MRF’s that sort recyclables is the norm, Eureka’s commitment to good full time jobs for all of their over 80 employees is unique. “By paying their employees living wages with good benefits, Eureka Recycling’s impact is felt throughout the communities where those workers live. We need more green jobs like that in

our cities.” stated Congressman Keith Ellison who represents Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives. "Most of the employees who work in recycling programs are people of color. Racial justice has to include environmental justice, and Eureka Recycling understands the importance of building toward zero waste through that lens."

Eric Lombardi, the executive director of Eco-Cycle International a nationally recognized pioneer in nonprofit recycling, has long professed the critical role nonprofits play in zero waste, “Over the last 20 years I have watched the amazing growth of our zero waste movement by growing the knowledge of what zero waste really means in terms of benefits and challenges. Eureka Recycling is a sister organization to ours and has played a leadership role in that revolution.” As a nonprofit social enterprise, Eureka Recycling’s profits/proceeds are invested back into the communities that they serve in demonstrations of how zero waste really is a viable strategy for solving some of our most pressing social and environmental challenges today.