

Advancing sustainable waste management for over a century

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From the formation of the Department of Street Cleaning in 1881, New York City has been at the forefront of advancing solid waste management. The early days were focused on human health impacts of unmanaged waste; however, even by 1895, the City pioneered the world's third and most sophisticated recycling program of its time with the inclusion of food waste diversion for animal feed and soil conditioning. An early pioneer in energy recovery, the City lit the Williamsburg Bridge with energy from waste in 1905. Today, New York City is once again at the forefront. With an ambitious plan to send zero waste to landfills by 2030, the City is once again pushing to expand its recycling programs by “making recycling available and easy for everyone”, proving that organics diversion can happen on a large scale, and teaching the next generation of New Yorkers about sustainable waste management through its Zero Waste Schools program. Complementing its recycling efforts is a judicious use of energy recovery, diverting roughly one-quarter of the residential waste remaining after recycling (approx. 850,000 tons) away from landfills.

