Recycling Business Survey Results
Joe Van Rossum

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources maintains a market directory of businesses that recycle, broker or collect waste materials in Wisconsin. SHWEC has conducted a survey of the 210 private businesses listed in the Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory (WRMD) to gain a better understanding of the number of workers employed by Wisconsin’s recycling industry and the value of the wages these workers are being paid. Of the 210 surveys sent out 87 were completed and returned; 10 were undeliverable, and 1 was returned blank.

While the WRMD is only a partial listing of recycling related businesses in Wisconsin, it does provide a sampling of a range of enterprises engaged in recycling related activities. Resources available for this survey limited the scope of the investigation. Business directories and Manufacturing directories certainly could have been used to expand the survey list; however the WRMD provided an accessible cross-section of recycling businesses in Wisconsin.

Survey design
The survey collected information regarding the number of workers employed at each company in total as well as the number of employees related to recycled materials. Respondents were also asked to categorize the workers into four categories; collection, processing, brokering, or manufacturing/end-use. Companies were also given six categories of wages in two dollar increments to select as the average hourly wage paid at their facility. Finally the survey collected information regarding the types of materials that were handled by the business and what products were produced if a company were a manufacturer. The survey did not collect information that could attribute a specific survey response with a specific company. This was done so as to minimize concerns regarding publication of company specific data.

Survey Results
Survey respondents reported 1,893 employees work at their facilities. Of these employees 1,394 or 72% of them were related to recycled materials. These values equate to an average of 16 recycling related employees per facility. The responses to the wages are listed in the table below:

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<th>$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$5.70 - $7.00</td>
<td>$11.01 - $13.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$7.01 - $9.00</td>
<td>$13.01 - $15.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>$9.01 - $11.00</td>
<td>$15.01 and above</td>
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The median response was the $11.01-$13.00 range. If a $12/hour wage were applied to the reported 1,394 recycling employees the annual wages paid to these workers would total an estimated $35 million.

Assuming the survey responses were representative of the remaining 113 business in the WRMD an attempt can be made to estimate the total number of jobs at these facilities. A total of 3,204 recycling jobs are related to recycling with estimated annual wages paid of nearly $80 million when the average response is applied to the 200 private facilities in the WRMD.

Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents stated their facilities existence depended solely upon recycling. This combined with the 72% of reported jobs related to recycling highlights the important role recycling plays for the businesses listed in the WRMD. The materials and products of the companies responding to the survey varied widely. Most facilities handled multiple materials. The most common materials were metals and paper products.

This survey provides a sampling of Wisconsin’s recycling industry. Many businesses rely upon recovered materials as a part of the operations; be it collecting, processing, brokering or the manufacture of products. A comprehensive survey combined with other data sources would provide a better understanding of recycling’s impact upon Wisconsin’s economy.

This fact sheet originally appeared as an article in the January 2006, SHWEC Newsletter. For further information about the survey please contact Joe Van Rossum, SHWEC Recycling Specialist, vanrossum@epd. engr. wisc. edu, or 608-262-0936.

Note: The survey was completed during October and November of 2005. The list of companies from the Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory was received from the Wisconsin DNR in September.