



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awards askHRgreen.org \$1.9 million to help Hampton Roads residents “Start Smart, Recycle Right”

(Hampton Roads, Va., June 12, 2024 – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has awarded a \$1,965,525 grant to the [askHRgreen.org public awareness initiative](#) to bolster its “Start Smart, Recycle Right” recycling education and outreach program in Hampton Roads. The grant is part of the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which includes a component to expand recycling infrastructure and education for waste management systems across the country.

Launched in 2011, the askHRgreen.org region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the [Hampton Roads Planning District Commission](#) with support from 17 cities and counties in the region and the Hampton Roads Sanitation District. The EPA grant will support outreach by askHRgreen.org and municipalities to amplify recycling awareness, educate residents on the benefits of recycling, improve access to recycling information and encourage all to “recycle right” in Hampton Roads.

“Our region, like so many others, needs a culture shift in recycling behavior, and the EPA grant will help us elevate our ‘Start Smart, Recycle Right’ message to help residents understand what is and is not recyclable locally,” said Katie Cullipher, HRPDC Principal Environmental Education Planner and a team leader of the askHRgreen.org initiative. “With this funding, we’ll work on streamlining messaging and making the information more accessible to all residents of Hampton Roads.”

According to Cullipher, starting smart begins when you shop. That includes choosing products according to their packaging—such as buying eggs in a cardboard carton instead of a plastic or Styrofoam container, which are not recyclable, or avoiding single-use plastics such as plastic straws, cutlery and bags. Then, you can recycle right by placing only those items accepted by local municipal programs in the recycling container.

To help communities across the region understand what is and is not recyclable locally, askHRgreen.org currently publishes an online [Recycling & Disposal Lookup Tool](#). It lists by community what is recyclable at curbside and through drop-off programs, as well as what constitutes trash.

With the EPA grant funding, askHRgreen.org leaders will build on the success and popularity of the Lookup Tool to enhance the technology used to deliver the information, making it more interactive and accessible to a variety of audiences. Over the three-year period of the grant, the group intends to employ a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to improve recycling with research driving the community engagement effort, implementing techniques such as:

- Neighborhood-level recycling audits and targeted education
- Distribution of recycling cart stickers to residents with details of what is accepted for recycling in their community
- Development of web-based recycling tools, mass media advertising campaigns, public relations and the development of educational and promotional materials

EPA grant timeline and next steps

In the months ahead, askHRgreen.org leadership will work in partnership with the 16 cities and counties of the Hampton Roads region to implement a multi-faceted recycling education and public outreach campaign that will run through May of 2027. This will involve working with local recycling and waste management staff through the existing askHRgreen.org Recycling & Beautification Committee to implement all facets of this grant.

“Residents often live in one city, work in another and play in a third,” said Wayne Jones, Community Outreach Coordinator for Suffolk Public Works and a member of the askHRgreen.org Recycling & Beautification committee. “When it comes to recycling, locality-specific messaging leads to confusion and contamination of the recycling stream. It is incumbent upon us to work together to improve how we inform residents about recycling in Hampton Roads. This EPA grant gives us the ability to do so like never before.”

Since initiating the one-region “Start Smart, Recycle Right” program in 2021, the Recycling & Beautification Committee’s outreach efforts have been limited by a lack of resources to change the culture of recycling in Hampton Roads.

“The EPA grant will provide us with the requisite resources to make effective change,” said Jones. “That’s what we call a truly smart start.”

About askHRgreen.org askhrgreen.org is your go-to resource for all things green in Hampton Roads – from recycling tips and pointers for keeping local waterways clean to water-saving ideas and simple steps to make local living easy on the environment. Launched in 2011, the region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and

powered by the following members: The cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight,

James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield; and HRSD. Like askHRgreen.org on Facebook, follow on Twitter and Instagram, tune in to YouTube and catch the “Let’s Talk Green” blog, written by a team of local experts.

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