



The Fire

A fire started at the Joint Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) on the afternoon of Wednesday, 05/31/2023 on the main sorting floor. All staff were evacuated quickly and no injuries were reported. The Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) arrived onsite and worked to extinguish the flames by the evening. MFD stayed overnight to perform fire watch protocols and approved staff were allowed to enter the building on June 1st. Impacts of the fire were severe and much of the sorting equipment was significantly damaged. The cause of the fire is unknown at this time and it's likely it will remain so due to the extent of the fire. Based on past fires at the MRF and others across the county, it might have been caused by contamination like a battery or other flammable material.

Recycling Collection and Future of the MRF

Resident curbside collection remains unimpacted. **Please continue to recycle right and set out carts on collection day**. Keep a copy of the [recycling guide](#) in common areas like the fridge and reference the online [recycling directory](#) to know where to throw. After being collected curbside, recyclables are taken to a City of Milwaukee transfer station and then moved to other regional MRFs for sorting. As for the future of the MRF, there are still many unknowns. DPW staff are working with various specialists to understand the scope of damage from the roof down to the plumbing. Once the inspections are completed and the full impacts of the damage are understood then planning can begin on next steps for the City owned site and future of the MRF. Providing an effective recycling program is the [law in Wisconsin](#) and it remains a priority for Milwaukee. DPW will continue to work to build a resilient program to support [Milwaukee's waste reduction goals](#)!



The Larger Impacts of MRF Fires



Electronic devices are now part of daily life from the workplace to home and most contain batteries like lithium-ion. If improperly disposed, these devices and other flammable material can cause dangerous and damaging fires at facilities. These fires put staff at a huge risk and can cause damage to facilities that is costly to repair or even beyond repair. In addition to staff safety and facility damage, MRF fires have impacts on regional recycling operations. When a MRF is inoperable due to fire or damaged equipment, recyclables need to be diverted to other regional facilities. If nearby MRFs can't take in the material due to capacity or processing constraints, the material must be shipped further out of the region resulting in higher costs and removing commodities from local markets. Southeastern Wisconsin is currently experiencing this strain due to the fires at the Milwaukee and Columbia County MRFs and construction at a third facility in the region. One small device in a curbside garbage or recycling cart has much larger lasting impacts and proper disposal is key to [helping prevent fires](#). See below for a list of drop off locations for electronics, batteries, and other household hazardous items.

A Note of Gratitude

An event like this truly reinforces the importance of building strong communities and relationships. We'd like to thank the MRF operator for its emphasis on fire safety and quickly getting staff out of the building. Thank you to the Milwaukee Fire Department and the first responders that rushed to the site to ensure staff safety and worked tirelessly to extinguish the fire. Thank you to the local MRFs and partners that jumped into action to accept and process our recycling. Thank you to City of Milwaukee residents for [recycling right](#) and their continued support of the recycling program. Finally, thank you to all the Sanitation and City of Milwaukee staff that quickly pivoted operations to avoid disruption to the residential curbside programs and whose daily operations will be significantly impacted long-term. These are the folks working endlessly in the background to make Milwaukee clean, green, and safe!



About the MRF



In the 1990's and early 2000's the City of Milwaukee processed recyclables at the Mount Vernon facility located in the [Menomonee River Valley](#). This facility was dual-stream, meaning residents sorted paper from their bottles and cans. In Fall 2011, the City began a single-sort recycling program, requiring recyclables to be transferred to a Waste Management facility in Germantown for processing while the City's MRF was retrofitted to accept the new single-stream materials. The Mount Vernon MRF began processing materials again in March 2015 and serves both the City of Milwaukee and over 20 communities in Waukesha County. The building and grounds continue under City of Milwaukee ownership while the processing equipment is jointly-owned with Waukesha County, and the MRF is operated by a private contractor. The award-winning intergovernmental cooperation agreement is administered by the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works and Waukesha County Parks & Land Use. Through the collaboration, the City of Milwaukee and Waukesha County replaced each of their respective end of life and obsolete dual stream processing systems with one larger system, still publicly owned, to cost-effectively serve both units of government. Serving a combined total of 298,448 households, the Joint MRF receives about 250 tons of single stream recyclables daily!

[Take a virtual tour of the MRF](#)

Battery and Electronics Disposal Resources

Battery Disposal

[Call2Recycle](#)

Search for nearby battery and cell phone drop off locations.

[DNR Household Battery Recycling Guide](#)

Learn about the different types of batteries you have and how to manage them.

Event Alert!

[Samsung Electronics \(Samsung\) and Universal Recycling Technologies \(URT\)](#)

Saturday, July 1st, 2023 8AM-1PM

American Family Field

Free electronics recycling event. **Registration required!**

E-Waste and Household Hazardous Waste

[City of Milwaukee Drop Off Centers](#)

The City of Milwaukee Drop Off Centers allow for the safe disposal and recycling of a wide variety of residential waste. Please check the list of **accepted items** before you go!

1) South: 3879 W Lincoln Avenue

2) North: 6660 N Industrial Road (must enter Industrial Road from Mill Road)

[MMSD](#)

Drop off your household hazardous waste at one of the three permanent collection locations or an upcoming **1-Day Drop-Off** site. Help us keep household chemicals out of our water and the environment.

[Refrigerant Depot, LLC](#)

Accepts residential and commercial appliances (working and/or non-working) and electronics.

Stay in the Know

Reminder! No garbage or recycling service on Tuesday, July 4th. [Check your curbside schedule here.](#)

Drop off centers are closed.

For more information visit [MilwaukeeRecycles.com](#) or call (414) 286-CITY (2489).

Follow [Facebook.com/MilwaukeeRecycles](#) and [Twitter.com/MkeRecycles](#) for tips and tricks.