

A Twin Cities Case Study

Using Industrial Clusters to Build an Urban Wood Utilization Program

The Challenge

Each year, the volume of wood removed from urban areas in the United States increases as developed areas expand and as trees need to be removed for public safety and other reasons. Tree removals that result from pests, storms, hazards, and other circumstances are creating vast amounts of urban “waste” wood in communities around the country, including those in Minnesota.

In the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, strong markets are emerging for recycling this waste material into useful products. The presence of tree service firms, wood recyclers, niche businesses, and ancillary wood-using companies within the Twin Cities has made people more aware of wood utilization activities. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, all the key elements for a successful industry cluster exist—businesses, companies, and organizations within a geographic region have closely aligned interests and have developed mutually beneficial links to one another. As the development of this sustainable urban wood utilization initiative gains momentum, the Twin Cities could potentially be a model for other communities.

The Solution

The Wood Education and Resource Center (WERC) of the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, provided funding to Dovetail Partners, Inc., to develop a case study that would serve as a model for other communities to develop strong urban “waste” wood utilization programs. Project personnel conducted a feasibility analysis to assess existing markets and development opportunities. They also evaluated economic conditions and the existing infrastructure.

Two keys to the Twin Cities’ success were identified—citizen support for the efforts and encouragement for recycling urban wood into useful products. District Energy in St. Paul, a biomass-fueled heat and power company, is an anchor industry that consistently uses a substantial amount of urban wood residue.

The case study analysis compared and contrasted how wood utilization activities in the Twin Cities mirrored a successful industry cluster. The study also included recommendations for promoting, investing, supporting, and expanding wood utilization activities. Project personnel developed resource materials and teaching tools that other communities could use to develop strong urban wood utilization clusters.



Red elm table made by Sheftel Construction with reclaimed wood from an urban tree.

Resulting Benefits

- Reduces tree-disposal fees for cash-strapped communities
- Increases environmental consciousness
- Encourages the expansion and development of niche urban wood-based businesses, and urban and community utilization programs
- Develops strong markets for urban wood recycling and utilization
- Converts urban “waste” wood into useful products

Sharing Success

- A 61-page case study, “Using Industrial Clusters to Build an Urban Wood Utilization Program: A Twin Cities Case Study,” was published. It is available at <http://www.dovetailinc.org/files/UrbanWoodClustersFinalReport.pdf>.
- A shorter report (19 pages) was distributed to over 10,000 subscribers through an electronic newsletter produced by Dovetail Partners, Inc. It is available at <http://www.dovetailinc.org/files/DovetailUrbanTC0510.pdf>.
- A Webinar conducted in collaboration with WERC is also available at http://www.na.fs.fed.us/werc/videos/wood_utilization/building_urban_wood_utilization_program.wmv.



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