

Iowa Waste Exchange Expands Reuse Opportunities Through Regional Collaboration in Dubuque

For decades, the Iowa Waste Exchange (IWE) has helped organizations in the Dubuque area reduce disposal costs and identify new opportunities for material reuse by connecting partners and facilitating more informed materials management decisions.

Since the late 1990s, Iowa Waste Exchange has supported the diversion of **more than 10,000 tons of material in Dubuque County** through reuse, recycling, and beneficial use pathways. These materials include large-volume industrial streams such as fly ash, scrap metal, and corrugated cardboard, as well as organic byproducts and wood materials. At the same time, IWE continues to facilitate smaller, high-value exchanges involving items such as 55-gallon drums, laboratory chemicals, electronics, appliances, furniture, and building materials—demonstrating the program’s flexibility across both large-scale and community-level applications.

In 2026, IWE participated in the Climate Action Festival hosted at the University of Dubuque, where Area 3 and 4 representatives Rebecca Kauten and Lindsey Given-Egli engaged directly with students, institutions, and community members. The event provided an opportunity to share information about reuse pathways, identify local material needs, and connect organizations with Iowa Waste Exchange services. These conversations help expand awareness of IWE services and identify potential matches for materials that might otherwise be landfilled.

The Dubuque region offers a strong foundation for this work. A network of higher education institutions, faith-based organizations, and community partners, including Sustainable Dubuque and Dubuque County Watersheds, actively collaborates on environmental stewardship initiatives. Through IWE engagement, these partners can extend those efforts into more coordinated approaches to materials management and reuse.

Working with the Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency (DMASWA) and the East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA), Iowa Waste Exchange supports these and other institutions in identifying reuse opportunities, improving material sorting practices, and connecting with potential end users. Such efforts are further strengthened through collaboration with the Dubuque Colleges Sustainability Coalition, led by Ashley Noonan, which brings together institutions including Clarke University, Divine Word College, Emmaus University, Loras College, Northeast Iowa Community College, the University of Dubuque, and Wartburg Seminary.

Through Iowa Waste Exchange, participating organizations are gaining a clearer understanding of the true cost of disposal—not only in tipping fees, but in the loss of materials that retain functional and economic value. As a result, partners are shifting decision-making practices,

evaluating materials as assets rather than waste. This has led to avoided purchasing costs, reduced disposal expenses, and improved internal materials management practices. In recent years, these efforts have also resulted in increased reuse activity and reduced contamination across participating institutions.

“Higher education has a responsibility to lead by example in how we steward our resources. When sustainability is visible and participatory, students learn by doing, developing habits that extend beyond the classroom while also creating immediate cost savings and long-term value for our campus and community.”

— Adam Hoffman, University of Dubuque

“Iowa Waste Exchange has been a long-standing partner in helping connect our community with practical reuse opportunities. That kind of collaboration reflects a shared commitment across organizations to work together, reduce costs, and find better, more sustainable solutions for the materials we manage every day.”

— Bev Wagner, DMASWA & Loras College

Through Iowa Waste Exchange, participating organizations are gaining a clearer understanding of the true cost of disposal—not only in tipping fees, but in the loss of materials that retain functional and economic value. As a result, partners are shifting decision-making practices, evaluating materials as assets rather than waste. This has led to avoided purchasing costs, reduced disposal expenses, and improved internal materials management practices. For example, surplus furniture, electronics, and laboratory materials that may have previously been discarded are now being reused across campuses and within the broader community.

Organizations interested in reducing disposal costs or identifying reuse opportunities are encouraged to contact Iowa Waste Exchange to learn more about available services. Contact your area resource specialist today by visiting www.iowawasteexchange.org.

Photo caption: University of Dubuque & Loras College students assisting Bev Wagner with waste sorting at the 2026 Climate Action Festival.

