

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

An Association of United States Mayors
Our National Treasure 2019



Frank Klipsch MRCTI Co-Chair and Mayor of Davenport, IA opens the Mayors' press conference during the MRCTI Annual Meeting in the Quad Cities, Sept 19.

Take-on Plastic Pollution, *Announce Multi-State Commitment to Reduce Plastic Waste in Mississippi River, Companies Pledge support*

More than thirty Mayors from the length of the Mississippi River gathered for the seventh annual meeting of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) in the Quad Cities, September 18-20. Mayors announced a commitment with state legislators and companies on an effort to reduce plastic waste in the Mississippi River Valley by calling on levels of government and organizations to reduce their plastic waste 20% by 2020.

"The Mississippi River provides billions of gallons of fresh water to industry each day and drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities. But when up to 80% of the plastic in our oceans comes from land-based sources and the Mississippi River drains an expansive 31-state landscape, it becomes clear that possibly 40 percent of plastic pollution in the Gulf originates from the Mississippi River," stated Mayor Rita Albrecht of Bemidji, MN, first city on the Mississippi River.

"Plastics are what we refer to as a persistent pollutant. Plastics don't break down, they simply become smaller and eventually turn into a dangerous confetti that spreads toxins and accumulates in the food chain eventually harming all of us through the food we eat and the water we drink," explained Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

State legislators gathered with Mayors to pledge action on plastic waste reduction commissions in each of the ten states that would work with cities to implement plans that work to reduce plastic waste in the Mississippi River Valley.

"We're standing with our Mayors on their effort to address this growing problem. One of the things we can do is form a plastic waste

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waste reduction commission in each state along the River that can work with our cities to establish practices targeting plastic waste that too often makes its way into our valuable watershed,” said State Representative Abe Hudson of Mississippi speaking for the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

“Plastic waste reduction needs to be addressed by leaders at every level of government. As states, we can look at this comprehensively. There are a number of options on the table for states to consider, but establishing these commissions is definitely a solid step. Plastic pollution is a big problem throughout our watershed and reducing it will be a complex effort involving all of us including recycling, waste management, and greater consumer awareness to reduce their consumption of single-use plastics,” stated State Representative Rick Hansen of Minnesota also speaking for the MRLC, a project of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.



Mayors were also joined by two companies that have come forward making the commitment to reduce their plastic waste 20% by 2020. Both Heart of America Group and Dynamic Restaurant Holdings whose coupled footprint includes hotels and restaurants from Florida to the Dakotas, pledged their own effort to meet the Mayors’ call to action.

“We’re completely committed to reducing our plastic waste footprint. We have also invited our team members and vendors into this conversation to brainstorm with us on ideas that can help make a difference for the environment and our next generation. In conjunction, we are also working to ensure our participation with the sustainable forest initiative” elaborated Kristel Whitty-Ersan, Director of Marketing, Dynamic Restaurant Holdings (Happy Joe’s Pizza & Ice Cream Parlors).



“Until recently, we had been looking at reducing our carbon footprint and powering more of our facilities with renewable energy. Now, we are adding plastic waste to our obligations because our water resources are so important,” said Mike Whalen, President & CEO of Heart of America Group.

“There needs to be an equal if not larger private sector response to this problem as plastics are just so pervasive throughout our economy. For instance, the amount of plastic produced from 2000 - 2010 exceeds the amount produced during the entire last century, stated Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

“As the first river system to join the UN’s Clean Seas campaign, we can do our part to pilot efforts for how to ensure the world’s major rivers stop contributing to the plastic pollution of our oceans,” said Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

“Mississippi River Mayors are taking action by helping mobilize local communities and working with state legislators and the private sector, to address single-use plastic pollution.”