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What's New in 2026: A Guide to New Jersey's Latest Environmental Laws

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In January, 2026 New Jersey passed several environmental bills that will shape the future of waste reduction, habitat protection, pollution prevention, and land conservation statewide. This article summarizes the new laws and provides links to learn more. Staying informed about new environmental laws helps us better understand the policy landscape and the environmental challenges facing our communities. Many of these new laws will be rolled out over time and the compliance dates are identified in the legislation.

Here is a breakdown of the new laws, what they mean, and when they go into effect. Links to articles and recorded webinars are also included to learn more about each topic.

1. [S3195 – “Skip the Stuff” \(Single Use Plastics Reduction\)](#)

New Jersey's newly approved "Skip the Stuff" law aims to reduce plastic waste by prohibiting restaurants and food service businesses from automatically providing single-use utensils and condiments unless specifically requested by the customer. The legislation also requires certain establishments to supply reusable, washable utensils for on-site dining. This part of a broader effort by the state to curb single-use plastics. While the bill applies widely, businesses that exclusively use eco-friendly alternative utensils and condiments are exempt from

the new requirements. The Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) is further directed to develop a public education campaign to help residents understand the environmental benefits of reducing single-use items. The bill takes effect August 1, 2026. More information at <https://dep.nj.gov/get-past-plastic/>

Watch the “[Plastic Reductions in NJ](#)” webinar for an update on New Jersey’s other plastic legislation.

2. [S2464 / A2090 – Solid Waste & Food Waste Reduction Act](#)

New Jersey’s A2090 requires every solid waste management district—including all counties and the Hackensack Meadowlands District—to add a comprehensive food waste reduction strategy to its official solid waste management plan. The law directs districts to cut the amount of food waste generated annually by at least 50% by the year 2035, compared to 2022 levels. It also mandates that the NJDEP publish a list of approved measures such as food donation programs, composting, anaerobic digestion, recycling initiatives, and public education campaigns. The law also directs NJDEP to create a tiered regulatory structure for composting facilities, with the goal of reducing barriers to local composting and organics recycling. Districts have two years from the law’s effective date to complete and implement their strategies. More information at <https://dep.nj.gov/dshw/swpl/fw/food-waste-reduction-plan/>

View the [Food Waste and Climate Change](#) webinar and learn how you can do your part to reduce food waste.

3. [S1029 – Invasive Species Management Act](#)

New Jersey now has its first comprehensive law regulating invasive species. S1029 prohibits the sale, distribution, import, export, and propagation of certain invasive plants. The law aims to protect native ecosystems. It establishes a 19 member New Jersey Invasive Species Council, which will advise state agencies and the Legislature on invasive species management and support coordinated statewide efforts. The law identifies over 30 prohibited invasive plants, many of which are commonly sold in the horticultural trade, including Japanese barberry, burning bush, and English ivy. The law authorizes both the NJDEP and the NJ Department of Agriculture to adopt regulations, oversee enforcement, and create public information resources. Import or propagation of a listed invasive species will become unlawful after approximately 1 year. Commercial sale and export of any listed invasive species will become unlawful after approximately 4 years. More information at <https://dep.nj.gov/invasive-species/>

To learn about controlling invasive plants, watch the webinar “[Removing Invasive Plants from Home Landscapes and Reducing Their Spread](#)”.

4. [S1042 / A1421 – “Protecting Against Forever Chemicals Act” \(PFAS\)](#)

This law establishes one of the state’s most comprehensive efforts to regulate PFAS, the persistent “forever chemicals” found in numerous consumer products and industrial processes. PFAS stands for Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. It bans intentionally-added PFAS in items like cosmetics, carpets, cookware, and food packaging. The law creates new requirements and prohibitions on the sale and use of products containing PFAS, authorizes state agencies to conduct research, and supports programs to identify, monitor, and reduce PFAS contamination in air, soil, and water. Lawmakers cite the chemicals’ widespread presence, strong resistance to environmental breakdown, and links to serious health risks as the driving force behind the legislation. The act also includes measures to phase out certain nonessential PFAS-containing products, with the goal of reducing public exposure and mitigating long-term environmental harm. The ban takes effect in two years. More information at <https://dep.nj.gov/pfas/>

Read the newsletter article “[What’s All the Fuss About PFAS?](#)”

5. [New Jersey Adopts REAL Rules to Address Climate Change and Flood Risk](#)

The NJDEP formally adopted the REAL (Resilient Environments and Landscapes) rules, a comprehensive update to the state’s land use regulations. The rules are designed to address increasing risks from sea level rise, flooding, and extreme weather. The REAL rules modernize several major regulatory programs, including the Flood Hazard Area, Coastal Zone, Freshwater Wetlands, and Stormwater Management rules. The intention is for new development planning to be based on current conditions and future climate impacts. The rules apply only to new development, redevelopment, and substantial improvements and do not affect existing buildings. They do not create “no build” zones or require elevation when it is impracticable. A key component is the creation of a new Inundation Risk Zone, which requires risk assessments and alternative analyses for certain residential and critical facilities. Another new component is a climate-adjusted flood elevation standard that adds four feet to FEMA coastal flood elevations to reflect projected sea level rise. The REAL rules are intended to help communities, residents, and businesses build safer, more resilient projects while supporting green infrastructure and long-term environmental protection in New Jersey.

For more information on coastal hazards, watch the “[NJ Coastal Hazards and Using MyCoast Online Tools](#)” webinar.

Stay Informed:

To stay up to date on new environmental bills you can visit the [New Jersey legislature advanced bill search website](#). The website allows you to search for bills using multiple criteria. You can also [track bills as they go through the legislative process](#). As these policies take effect over the coming months and years, staying informed will help communities, businesses, and residents prepare for and actively participate in creating a more sustainable New Jersey.