The municipal recycling sector has faced many challenges in recent years, including the changing material stream. Old corrugated containers (OCC) and plastic packaging of various types continue to increase, while old newspapers (ONP) have dwindled to a trickle. Material recovery facilities (MRFs) also are facing labor shortages and increasing contamination in incoming loads. Additionally, China has essentially disappeared as an end market, and the country’s restrictions on postconsumer scrap imports have led to an abundance of mixed paper and mixed plastics in North America, which has driven down pricing for these materials and made movement more challenging.

The rankings for our 2019 Map & List of North America’s Largest MRFs are based on the tons of recyclables these facilities shipped in 2018. In the case of MRFs operated by Phoenix-based Republic Services Inc., the figures reported equal the tons the company sold from its individual MRFs. If material moved at negative value, the company did not report it.

Despite the challenges the municipal recycling sector has been facing, the 75 largest MRFs in North America still processed and shipped a total of nearly 8.2 million tons of recyclables in 2018. Some MRFs handled and shipped more tons in 2018, including our No. 1 facility, Sims Municipal Recycling’s Sunset Park MRF in Brooklyn, New York. That MRF shipped 241,884 tons in 2016. In 2018, that figure grew to 247,201 tons.

However, other MRFs saw their total tons shipped decrease, including Resource Management Cos.’ Chicago Ridge, Illinois, MRF, which ranked in the No. 3 spot on our 2019 list. That facility shipped 222,433 tons of recyclables in 2016, which declined to 203,807 tons in 2018. Casella Waste Systems Inc.’s Charlestown, Massachusetts, MRF (No. 4 on this year’s list) also saw a decrease in tons shipped in 2018 compared with 2016: 194,450 versus 204,580.

Houston-based Waste Management continues to dominate the list with a total of 21 MRFs. Toronto-based Waste Connections has 11 MRFs on the list, while Republic Services has 10.

When you visit www.RecyclingToday.com/article/north-americas-largest-mrf---2019, you can find interviews with some of these MRF operators, who share how they are addressing the challenges they are facing.

Seismic shifts
North America’s largest material recovery facilities have weathered a number of tremors that have shaken the municipal recycling landscape.

BY DEANNE TOTO

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