

Meet Shawn Donovan

Salvage Yard Program Coordinator

Department of Environmental Conservation

Out of sight and out of mind – that’s usually the mantra when it comes to getting rid of our junk. Corralled and sorted at a local salvage yard, most of us breathe a sigh of relief when we’ve dealt with our broken vehicles, used engine oil and old refrigerators. But the story doesn’t end there. Over time, rusting storage containers, corroding batteries and leaking fluid lines can drip chemicals onto soil and into groundwater. Our junk lives on, affecting the environment in ways that we can’t always anticipate.



There’s only one person in the Agency of Natural Resources that goes behind the scenes of Vermont’s salvage yards, and that’s Shawn Donovan. The primary employee of the Salvage Yard Program, Shawn works with salvage yard operators to make sure that they handle their waste stream responsibly. “The folks I work with routinely in the industry play a huge part in preserving our quality of life. Salvage yards are inherently a high risk industry and they can generate real threats to the environment if they’re not operated correctly.”

The Salvage Yard Program provides technical assistance and conducts routine inspections to all 58 currently permitted salvage yards in Vermont, ensuring that they operate in compliance with state regulations. In addition, Shawn spends time with property owners that operate salvage yards without the required permits. State rules require all first-time permit applicants to meet specific zoning requirements and setbacks from surface waters, water supplies, and right-of-ways. In some cases, a salvage yard just can’t meet these requirements and needs to close its doors.

A native Vermonter, Shawn has always felt an affinity for the state’s great outdoors. His favorite childhood memories come from skiing, biking, hiking and camping in Vermont, activities that ultimately connected him to his college major, geology. Graduating in 2001 from Castleton State College, Shawn moved to Portland, Oregon and began building his resume by volunteering and advocating for environmental causes on a local level. “I did a lot of work with a neighborhood activist organization that focused on

stormwater runoff and water quality issues. And really, I did a lot of skiing and climbing. The Pacific Northwest is beautiful.”

After three years in Oregon, Shawn moved back to Vermont to focus on his career in a state he loved. Finding work as an environmental consultant in the private sector, he spent the next six years investigating contaminated soil and groundwater at sites throughout New England. Serving primarily as a field geologist and project scientist, Shawn was responsible for understanding the extent of underground chemical contamination, the risk it posed to people and the environment, and the logistics required to clean it up.

Says Shawn of moving back to Vermont, “I always had it in my mind that the ideal job for me would be with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. It’s a far-reaching organization that can really affect change in our state and preserve our natural resources.” He began work with the DEC’s Salvage Yard Program in 2013, joining the department’s Spill Response Program in 2015. Under the mentorship of Marc Roy, a DEC veteran with over 25 years of service, Shawn is now serving as the Salvage Yard Program Coordinator and in fact, as its only full-time employee.

“When someone calls the Salvage Yard Program number, it’s my cell phone that rings,” says Shawn. “I talk one-on-one with folks and help them figure out how to deal with environmental violations, working through the logistics of their specific case. It’s time consuming but it’s personal – I like working that way.”

Despite only being three years on the job, Shawn has already created change at the legislative level. With input from the salvage yard industry, his program wrote a rule that was adopted by a legislative committee. The rule sets standards for salvage yard facilities to operate with minimal impact to the environment and gives the Agency of Natural Resources the authority to enforce these standards.

Understanding the work that goes on behind the scenes of any salvage yard operation serves as a reminder to all of us that environmental conservation doesn’t just happen on mountain ridges or in wetlands. The impact of our waste disposal is carefully managed by the state, although limited resources mean that Vermonters need to be attentive to their own garbage. Anyone concerned about salvage yard operation should contact the [DEC Salvage Yard Program](#), knowing, of course, that it will be Shawn who answers the phone. “Yes, my job is pretty unique! But ANR is a unique place to work. I feel fortunate to work here and look forward to developing my career.”