

Michael F. Easley, Governor



William G. Ross Jr., Secretary

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate Contact: Diana Kees, (919) 715-6515 or Chrystal Bartlett, (919) 733-4996 ext. 425
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NORTH CAROLINA SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL, RECYCLING INCREASES

RALEIGH – North Carolina’s slow economy has failed to put a lid on its growing waste stream, according to the latest Solid Waste Management Annual Report issued by the state’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Despite conventional wisdom that during times of economic recession less waste is disposed of in landfills, North Carolina continues a trend of increasing the amount of solid waste requiring disposal. The 2001 report shows the per capita disposal rate increased to 1.22 tons per person per year, a one percent increase over last year’s rate of 1.21 tons per person per year. In total, North Carolinians last year disposed of just over 10 million tons of waste – an increase of nearly 251,000 tons from the previous year. At the current rate of growth, disposal could grow to nearly 14 million tons in the next 10 years, increasing demand for new landfill space.

And yet according to the report, approval for siting or expanding solid waste landfills remains difficult. Recent decisions for new municipal landfills have been challenged under various legal procedures. Proposed facilities also consistently garner intensively negative public response, making local elected officials often reluctant to approve them. DENR’s Solid Waste Section has sought to improve the level of debate in the landfill siting process and help citizens make fact-based, informed decisions about management of their solid waste by conducting a series of public meetings to allow more opportunity for public participation, forwarding any concerns to appropriate agencies.

As a further development, recovery of plastic, glass and metal containers also grew for a second year with a nine percent increase. This increase in recovery of “traditional” recyclables has a significant link to educational efforts such as the partnership between the state and local governments to conduct the “Recycle Guys” campaign. The Recycle Guys program centers on cartoon characters that represent different recyclable materials that appear in television and radio advertisements promoting recycling, source reduction, composting and buying recycling products. The campaign has proved enormously popular with children in particular.

“We see both a lot of progress and a lot of room for improvement in managing wastes in North Carolina,” said DENR Secretary Bill Ross. “We need to keep encouraging citizens, businesses, government agencies and others to participate broadly in waste reduction, and to take advantage of the wide environmental and economic benefits that come from recycling.”

According to an analysis of county 10-year solid waste plans, if each county achieved its waste reduction goal for fiscal year 2009-2010, solid waste disposal could decrease by 15 percent, thus reversing a trend toward greater dependence on landfills and under-achievement of waste diversion.

The report recommends that municipalities increase source reduction and recycling efforts, as well as the source-separated composting of organics to minimize the need for more landfill space as the state’s population and per capita disposal continues to increase. Enhancement of recycling infrastructure and markets to increase source reduction and recycling would also help reduce the need for additional landfill capacity.

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Other findings from the annual report include:

- Statewide, 18 counties achieved their waste reduction goal for fiscal year 2000-2001.
- North Carolina continues to be a net exporter of municipal solid waste. Approximately 9 percent of the state's total waste disposed in fiscal year 2001-2002 was exported. Waste imports have increased, from nearly 22,000 tons in fiscal year 2000-2001 to about 118,000 tons in fiscal year 2001-2002.
- Industrial, commercial and construction and demolition waste comprise more than 70 percent of the waste stream in North Carolina's largest waste-producing counties.
- Several factors have helped counties progress toward their waste reduction goals, including:
 - aggressive efforts that targets multiple-waste-generating sectors such as schools, hospitals, restaurants, government agencies, etc.
 - higher levels of recycling promotion and education, including continuous multi-medium and multi-targeting educational initiatives such as the "Recycle Guys" campaign.
- A new addition to some local collection programs – obsolete electronics – is a consistent cost market for local governments. In general, municipalities with electronics collection programs were charged \$5 to \$6 per computer monitor collected.
- State agency efforts to buy recycled products and improve recycling markets continue to enjoy success. Twenty-eight agencies buy only recycled paper and 80 percent of all paper purchases had recycled content.

The report is available electronically at http://wastenot.enr.state.nc.us/swhome/SW01-02_AR.htm. For more information, please call Paul Crissman (paul.crissman@ncmail.net) with the Division of Waste Management at (919) 733-0692, or Scott Mouw (scott.mouw@ncmail.net) with the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance at (919) 715-6512.

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