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NORTH CAROLINA'S SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL CONTINUES TO INCREASE

RALEIGH – North Carolina is making little progress in reducing the steady growth of the state's waste generation and disposal, according to the latest Solid Waste Management Annual Report issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The state experienced increases in both the numbers of tons of waste sent to landfills and the amount of waste disposed per capita. In total, North Carolinians threw out more than 10.7 million tons of waste – an increase of 476,484 tons from the previous year. The rise in waste outpaced the rate of population growth, with a three percent increase per capita over last fiscal year's measurement, expanding from 1.23 tons per person per year to 1.27 tons per person per year.

Although the state has moved forward with improvements to solid waste management methods, including better record-keeping and the ability to calculate landfill capacity, waste disposal totals continue to climb. Ten North Carolina counties with 39 percent of the population accounted for 46 percent of the solid waste disposed in the state. Sixty-two counties exported at least some waste to landfills in Virginia, South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

Total local government recycling decreased by almost 100,000 tons during fiscal year 2003-2004. The entire decrease can be attributed to the yearly fluctuation of yard waste and other organic matter due to weather conditions. Municipal and county recovery of non-organic waste (cans, bottles, newspaper, etc.) grew by 3,000 tons or 0.7 percent. Over the same period the state's population grew by 1.1 percent.

Despite strong market conditions, more than 20 local governments discontinued curbside recycling programs during the year, continuing a five-year downward trend in the number of programs available to North Carolinians. The remaining 310 local government programs were buoyed by an almost unprecedented demand for recyclable materials across the board, with material prices staying stable and above average throughout the year. Material markets allow for much greater diversion of recyclables from North Carolina's growing waste stream.

To decrease future waste disposal, state waste management officials recommend implementing the following goals:

- Increase source reduction, municipal solid waste recycling and source-separated composting of organic materials to reduce the need for additional municipal solid waste disposal capacity as the population grows and predicted per capita disposal amounts increase.
- Enhance the materials recovery infrastructure.
- Reissue and enforce Executive Order No. 156, "State Government Sustainability, Reduction of Solid Waste, and Procurement of Environmentally Preferable Products" to increase state government support for recycled content products.

"The amazing thing is the apparently relentless increase in the waste disposal numbers," said Paul Crissman, environmental programs manager for the Division of Waste Management's Solid Waste Section. "Even though several strong waste reduction program activities are in place across the state, waste disposal continues to grow. This is all the more remarkable due to the state's changing economic activities and growth patterns."

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Other findings from the annual report include:

- North Carolina permitted solid waste management landfills received more than 9.67 million tons of solid waste during FY 2003-2004. Almost 109,000 tons originated from other states, a decrease of 24,342 import tons during the previous period. South Carolina and Virginia accounted for all imported waste.
- North Carolina continues to rely heavily on exporting waste. More than one million tons of waste was exported in fiscal year 2003-2004 compared with 108,000 imported tons.
- Major materials recovered by North Carolina local governments during FY 2003-2004 were fiber (55 percent), metals (23 percent) and glass (11 percent).
- The per person disposal rate has increased 18 percent from the FY 1991-1992 base year.
- For the fifth straight year the number of local government curbside programs declined, although the number of households served grew.

The report is available electronically at http://wastenotnc.org/SWHOME/SW03-04_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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