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NCDENR
North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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NORTH CAROLINA FAILS TO MEET SOLID WASTE REDUCTION GOAL

RALEIGH – Solid waste disposal per capita is growing even faster than the state's population, according to the latest Solid Waste Management Annual Report issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The report shows that the rate of solid waste disposal went from 6.8 million tons to 9.75 million tons from FY 1991-92 to FY 2000-01, an increase of 2.95 million tons, while the population rate went from 6.78 million to 8.05 million, an expansion of 1.27 million, in the same time period. At the current rate of growth, disposal could grow to 13 million tons by 2010, a doubling of annual tonnage disposed in only two decades.

DENR attributes much of the growth in waste to the state's booming economy throughout the 1990s, which boosted the consumption and disposal of consumer goods and packaging, as well as increased waste generated at businesses, industries and construction sites. A small downturn in last year's disposal rate is probably due to the economic slowdown, as well as to the inflated amount of waste disposed the previous year because of storm debris following Hurricane Floyd.

These latest figures also show that North Carolina missed its 10-year goal of reducing per capita disposal by 40 percent by June 30, 2001.Waste disposal actually increased from 1.01 tons per capita in FY 1991-92 to 1.21 tons per capita by June 30, 2001. This figure was well above the .67 tons per capita the state aimed for in setting this goal in 1991 in the wake of widespread closure of local landfills and a growing concern over the environmental impacts of disposal.

Stemming the disposal rate from rising even faster has been a considerable increase in recycling in North Carolina over the past decade. The state has an estimated recycling rate on par with other states around the country at 25 percent or higher. Recycling and yard waste programs run by local governments consistently divert close to 1 million tons per year from disposal (985,000 tons in FY 2000-01). Recovery rates for newsprint and cardboard are estimated to be more than 50 percent, although some other materials lag behind.

"Recycling remains one of the most powerful environmental actions that citizens can take," said DENR Secretary Bill Ross. "We hope progress in this area will help us reduce our growing dependence on landfill disposal."

Increased private activity in recycling, especially for construction and demolition waste, is occurring more frequently and could be a factor in slowing the growth in waste disposal. A DENR study in 2000 found that recycling businesses account for approximately 12,000 jobs in North Carolina. "We are encouraged by the growth in the recycling industry in North Carolina, which creates jobs while helping convert waste into valuable products," said Ross.

However, prices paid for recyclable commodities have fallen in the face of the economic downturn and competition with declining virgin material prices. Increased efforts to buy products made of recycled material are effective, but need to expand to improve recycling market conditions.

The report recommends that the General Assembly convene a study committee to explore measures that can further reduce waste and improve the state's environmental performance in managing solid waste.

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Ross said that DENR is addressing disposal capacity issues as well as public concerns over landfill siting issues. According to the report, solid waste landfills remain difficult to site – both private and public disposal facilities proposed in a number of counties have either been challenged by citizens or have been rejected by local officials.

Other findings from the annual report include:

- Most citizens in North Carolina do not have access to household hazardous waste collection programs that help divert paints, pesticides, cleaners and other leftover household chemicals away from landfills.
- North Carolina counties manage approximately nine million discarded tires each year, or just over one tire per person per year. Approximately 44 percent of old tires were recycled in FY 2000-01, and all but a few small illegal tire dumps have been cleaned up.
- The statewide advanced disposal fee on white goods (appliances) has drastically reduced illegal disposal of these items and helped counties divert an estimated 1.3 million appliances from disposal in FY2000-01.
- 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 Department of Transportation is also doing its part to use recycled materials in road-building projects, including 2 million tires in FY2000-01. DOT also won a national award for "de-constructing" a number of houses in road right-of-ways rather than standard demolition and disposal.
- The Department of Administration continues to add high quality recycled products to purchase contracts for state agencies, included re-refined motor oils that meet the same American Petroleum Institute specifications as virgin oil.

The report is available electronically at http://wastenot.enr.state.nc.us/swhome/annrep01.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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