

# Profiles in Garbage

BY CHAZ MILLER

## Municipal Solid Waste 2008

2008 saw less waste and less recycling.

**M**unicipal solid waste (MSW) is the stuff we have used and no longer need. EPA's MSW data does not include construction and demolition debris (C&D), hazardous, medical, radioactive or industrial waste, so this profile also excludes those categories.

EPA estimates the size of the waste stream by using manufacturing production data, estimates of product imports and exports, and estimates of product lifetimes. Food and yard waste is estimated based on sampling studies. EPA has used a consistent estimation methodology for four decades.

Waste data from the 50 states uses actual tonnages from disposal, recycling and composting facilities. State data shows more solid waste than EPA's data. Using state data, Biocycle magazine estimated 413 million tons of solid waste were generated in 2006. State data often includes non-hazardous solid waste such as C&D and industrial waste. The 50 states do not count waste consistently.

In a more comprehensive survey, the Environmental Research and Education Foundation tallied all U.S. disposal facilities and estimated that 545 million tons of waste were managed in 2000, of which 146 million tons were recycled or composted. That covers all non-hazardous Subtitle D solid waste managed outside of the generator's facility. ■

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#### SOURCES:

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 Environmental Research and Education Foundation, [www.erefnd.org](http://www.erefnd.org)  
 "Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling, and Disposal in the United States: 2008 Facts and Figures," U.S. EPA, Office of Solid Waste, 2009, [www.epa.gov/osw](http://www.epa.gov/osw)  
 Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, [www.isri.org](http://www.isri.org)  
 National Solid Wastes Management Association, [www.nswma.org](http://www.nswma.org)  
 "National Source Reduction Characterization Report," USEPA, Office of Solid Waste, 1999, [www.epa.gov/osw](http://www.epa.gov/osw)

Data is from 2008 EPA estimates, except where noted.

### MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE 2008 FACTS

#### Generated:

- 249.6 million tons.
- 1,642.5 pounds per person per year.
- 4.5 pounds per person, per day.
- Yard trimmings, food wastes, corrugated boxes, wood packaging and glass bottles are the largest items in MSW before recycling.

#### Recycled:

- 60.8 million tons, a 24.3% recycling rate.
- 401.5 pounds per person, per year.
- 1.1 pounds per person, per day.
- Corrugated boxes, newspapers, office paper, glass bottles and lead acid batteries are the most recycled by weight.
- Lead-acid batteries, newspapers,

corrugated boxes, office papers and "major appliances" have the highest recycling rate.

#### Recycled Content:

- Aluminum cans, recycled paperboard, corrugated medium and glass bottles have high levels of recycled content.

#### Composted:

- 22.1 million tons of yard and food waste.
- 8.9% composting rate for all MSW.
- 64.7% composting rate for yard waste.
- 2.5% rate for food waste.
- 146 pounds per person, per year.
- 0.4 pounds per person, per day.

#### Incinerated or Landfilled:

- 166.7 million tons, or 66.8% of MSW.
- 31.6 million tons combusted with energy recovery.
- 135.1 million tons landfilled.
- 1,095 pounds per person, per year.
- 3 pounds per person, per day.

#### Density:

- 323,812,000 cubic yards (c.y.) of MSW landfilled.
- Aluminum cans and plastic bottles have the lowest landfill density.
- Glass bottles and food waste have the highest landfill density.
- An "average" pound of trash has

a landfill density of 739 pounds per c.y.

#### Source Reduction:

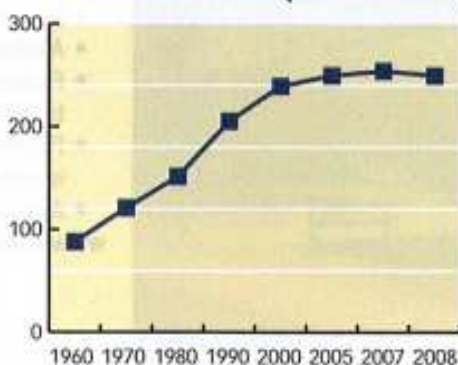
- Backyard composting, grasscycling and product lightweighting reduce the waste stream.
- A declining economy reduces the waste stream and the amount of material recycled.

#### End Market Specifications:

- ISRI Paper Stock, Ferrous, Non-Ferrous and Plastic Guidelines provide specifications for individual recyclables.

### 2008 MSW Generation

Tons Generated (in millions)



Pounds Per Person Per Day

