



# Wastes

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## Non-Hazardous Waste

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### Municipal Solid Waste

Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) —more commonly known as trash or garbage— consists of everyday items such as product packaging, grass clippings, furniture, clothing, bottles, food scraps, newspapers, appliances, paint, and batteries.

In 2008, U.S. residents, businesses, and institutions produced about 250 million tons of MSW, which is approximately 4.5 pounds of waste per person per day.

Several MSW management practices, such as source reduction, recycling, and composting, prevent or divert materials from the wastestream. [Source reduction](#) involves altering the design, manufacture, or use of products and materials to reduce the amount and toxicity of what gets thrown away. [Recycling](#) diverts items, such as paper, glass, plastic, and metals, from the wastestream. These materials are sorted, collected, and processed

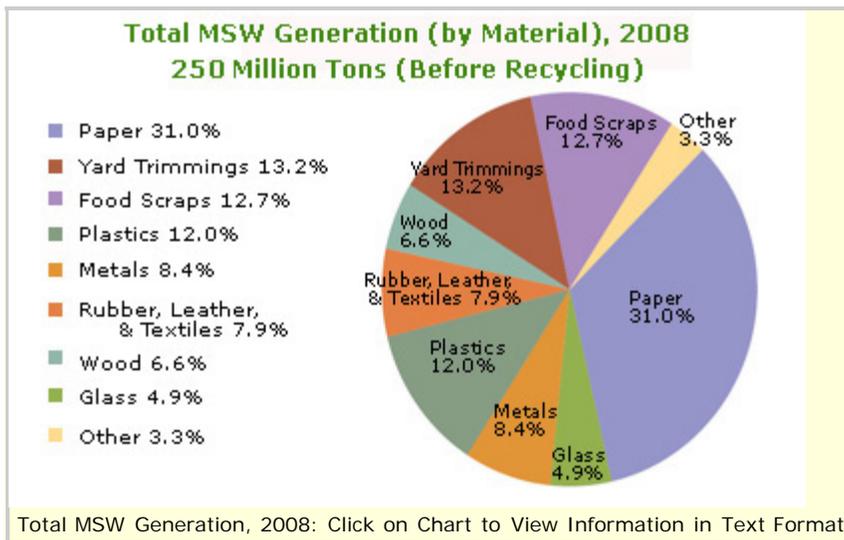
and then manufactured, sold, and bought as new products. [Composting](#) decomposes organic waste, such as food scraps and yard trimmings, with microorganisms (mainly bacteria and fungi), producing a humus-like substance.

MSW Generation Rates, 1960 -2008: [Click on Chart to View Information in Text Format](#)

Other practices address those materials that require disposal. [Landfills](#) are engineered areas where waste is placed into the land. Landfills usually have liner systems and other safeguards to prevent groundwater contamination.

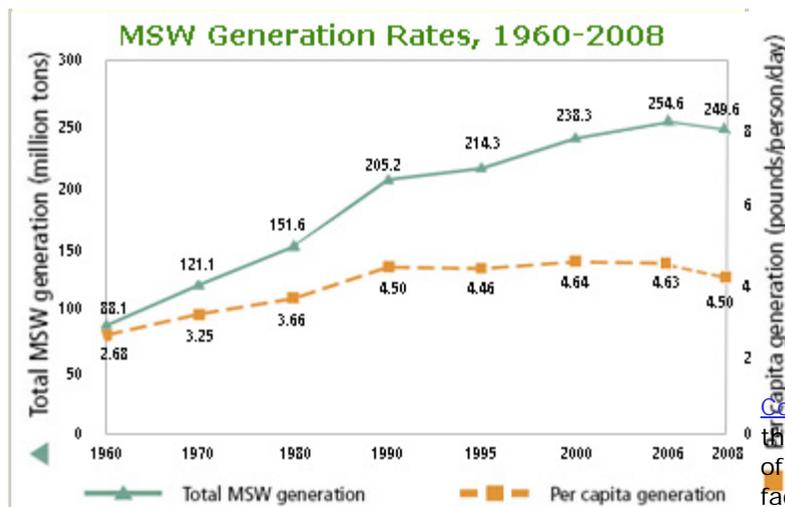
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[Combustion](#) is another MSW practice that has helped reduce the amount of landfill space needed. Combustion facilities burn MSW at a high temperature, reducing waste volume

and generating electricity.

### Solid Waste Hierarchy

EPA has ranked the most environmentally sound strategies for MSW. Source reduction (including reuse) is the most preferred method, followed by recycling and composting, and, lastly, disposal in combustion facilities and landfills.

Currently, in the United States, 33.2\* percent is recovered and recycled or composted, 12.6 percent is burned at combustion facilities, and the remaining 54 percent is disposed of in landfills.

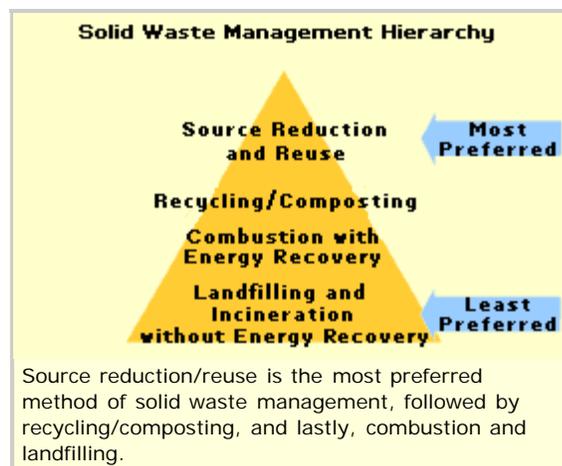
\* The previously published 2007 recycling rate, 33.4 percent, was revised to 33.1 percent in this year's report, based on updated data.

### Source Reduction (Waste Prevention)

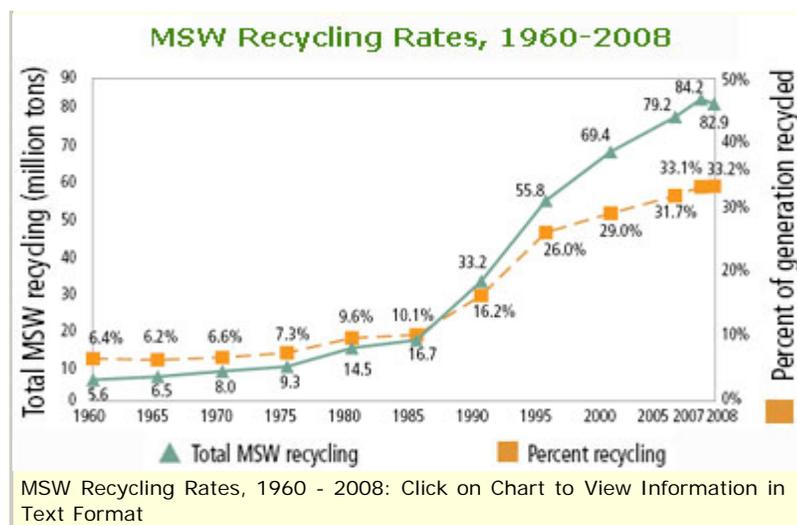
Source reduction can be a successful method of reducing waste generation. Practices such as grasscycling, backyard composting, two-sided copying of paper, and transport packaging reduction by industry have yielded substantial benefits through source reduction.

Source reduction has many environmental benefits. It prevents emissions of many greenhouse gases, reduces pollutants, saves energy, conserves resources, and reduces the need for new landfills and combustors.

### Recycling



Recycling, including composting, diverted 83 million tons of material away from disposal in 2008, up from 15 million tons in 1980, when the recycle rate was just 10% and 90% of MSW was being combusted with energy recovery or disposed of by landfilling.

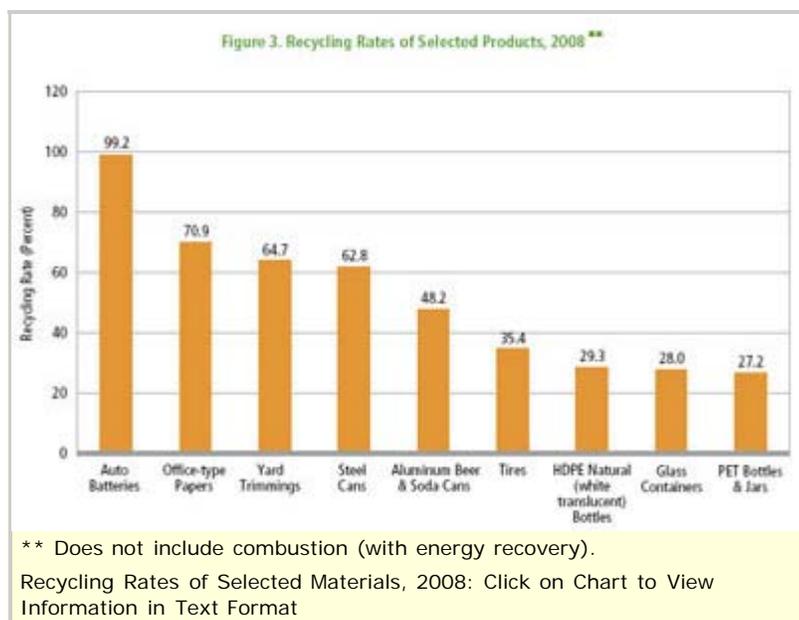


Typical materials that are recycled include batteries, recycled at a rate of 99%, office type paper at 71%, and yard trimmings at 65%. These materials and others may be recycled through curbside programs, drop-off centers,

buy-back programs, and deposit systems.

Recycling prevents the emission of many greenhouse gases and water pollutants, saves energy, supplies valuable raw materials to industry, creates jobs, stimulates the development of greener technologies, conserves resources for our children's future, and reduces the need for new landfills and combustors.

Recycling also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions that affect global climate. In 2008, the national recycling rate of 33.2 percent (83 million tons recycled) prevented the release of approximately 182 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent into the air--roughly the amount emitted annually by 33 million cars, or 1.3 quadrillion BTUs, saving energy equivalent to 10.2 billion gallons of gasoline.



## Combustion/Incineration

Burning MSW can generate energy while reducing the amount of waste by up to 90 percent in volume and 75 percent in weight.

EPA's [Office of Air and Radiation](#) is primarily responsible for regulating combustors because air emissions from combustion pose the greatest environmental concern.

## Landfills

Under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), landfills that accept MSW are primarily regulated by state, tribal, and local governments. EPA, however, has established national standards these landfills must meet in order to stay open. Municipal landfills can, however, accept [household hazardous waste](#).

While the number of U.S. landfills has steadily declined over the years, the average landfill size has increased. At the national level, landfill capacity appears to be sufficient, although it is limited in some areas.

## Household Hazardous Waste

Households often discard many common items such as paint, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides, that contain hazardous components. Leftover portions of these products are called [household hazardous waste](#) (HHW). These products, if mishandled, can be dangerous to your health and the environment.

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## Industrial Waste

[Commercial and institutional, or industrial, waste](#) is often a significant portion of municipal solid waste, even in small cities and suburbs. In contrast to most residential waste, commercial material is usually collected by the private sector.

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