



## N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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### LATEST ENVIRONMENTAL FIGURES SHOW NORTH CAROLINIANS THROWING AWAY MORE

RALEIGH – North Carolinians set a new record between July 1999 and June 2000 by disposing of more than 10.2 million tons of trash – an increase of more than one million tons over the previous year.

The amount of North Carolina waste thrown into landfills has increased by 45 percent in the last decade, according to figures from the Solid Waste Management Annual Report (<http://wastenot.enr.state.nc.us/swhome/annrep.htm>), compiled by the divisions of Waste Management and Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA).

Nearly 1.3 tons of garbage are disposed of each year per person in North Carolina, a figure that guarantees the state will not meet its 1991 goal of a 40 percent decrease in the per capita solid waste disposal rate by 2001. In fact, projections for the 2001 disposal rate show a 28 percent **increase** per capita compared to 1991. Overall, disposed waste increased a likely 40 percent.

"At the current rate of increase, North Carolinians will be throwing away 14 million tons per year of waste by 2020," said Scott Mouw, chief of DPPEA's Community and Business Assistance Section. "If this disposal rate continues, the state will dispose of more than a half billion tons of waste by 2050."

Other significant findings from the report include:

- Half of North Carolina's waste comes from its 10 most populous counties. Three counties, Mecklenburg, Guilford and Wake, annually generate about thirty percent of the state's waste.
- North Carolina is a net exporter of waste, sending more than one million tons last year to out-of-state landfills, chiefly located in Virginia and South Carolina. These states sent close to 42,000 tons of their waste to North Carolina landfills last year.
- Natural disasters tend to dramatically increase waste generation. Hurricane Fran generated an estimated 700,000 tons of debris; Hurricane Floyd accounted for an additional 329,000 tons.
- Debris from construction and demolition activities, representing 29 percent of the waste stream, is the largest single source of wastes in North Carolina.
- The recovery of traditional recyclables (paper commodities, glass, plastic bottles and cans) has dropped in each of the past four years. This suggests a decline in local recycling program participation and effectiveness.

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- Four of the top 10 counties (Mecklenburg, Durham, Buncombe and Pitt) contributed more, on a percentage basis, to the state's overall tonnage recycled than to tons disposed. Two counties – Cumberland and Gaston – provided limited recycling efforts, accounting for about 1.5 percent of the state's recovery, despite disposing more than six percent of North Carolina's waste.
- Other challenges facing North Carolina include battling illegal disposal, monitoring the long-term environmental effects of closed landfills, and keeping household hazardous wastes (e.g., paints, pesticides, cleaners, etc.) out of landfills.

Despite the rapid expansion of the waste stream, recycling has proven to be a critical method of protecting North Carolina's environment:

- Local government programs alone divert more than 1 million tons of materials annually from disposal.
- Statewide and local disposal bans have increased the level of recycling for many materials.
- Markets are also relatively healthy for recyclable materials; the state has seen strong business growth in the recycling sector.
- More than 12,000 jobs now rely on recycling in the state, and new businesses are being developed to recycle products ranging from computers to carpet and drywall.
- North Carolina has encouraged the development of recycling markets through effective state programs to buy recycled products, especially recycled paper, which the state now buys exclusively.

The report incorporated information from annual local government reports and 10-year solid waste plans, permitted solid waste management facilities, state agencies' data and voluntary reporting from out-of-state landfills. For more information, please contact Paul Crissman at (919) 733-0692, ext. 254 or [paul.crissman@ncmail.net](mailto:paul.crissman@ncmail.net); or Scott Mouw, state recycling chief, at (919) 715-6512 or [scott.mouw@ncmail.net](mailto:scott.mouw@ncmail.net)

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