

Basic Facts About Solid Waste Management in Virginia

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The Politics of Solid Waste Management in Virginia

According to the EPA and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), every one of us produces between four to five pounds of solid wastes every day.

According to DEQ statistics, in 2004, Virginians produced 9 million tons of solid wastes. By 2007, Virginians increased that amount to 9.5 million tons.

By 2007, Virginians were recycling about 38.5% of their solid municipal wastes.

The largest component of the solid waste stream is paper and paper goods.

In order for a waste product to be classified as hazardous, it must meet at least one of the following criteria: ignitability (explodes or catches on fire), corrosivity, reactivity, and toxicity (poisonous or infectious).

Most of the solid waste landfill facilities have three main components: collection, transfer, and proper disposal of wastes.

Solid waste management is a classic study of federalism. Federal, state, and local laws and ordinances have a multitude of requirements and laws that apply to the disposal of solid wastes.

The land that is used for landfills is usually the same land that could be used for residential and commercial development.

By 2004, Americans were recycling or reusing about one-quarter of our solid trash.

The current hierarchy of ways to manage solid wastes in Virginia is source reduction, reuse and recycle, energy production, incineration to reduce volume, and then land filling.

The federal government monitors and regulates the disposal of nuclear wastes. It also sets some of the standards for the states and localities to follow in the disposal of solid wastes.

The Department of Environmental Quality sets the standards for the storage, handling, and disposing of solid wastes.

For industrial wastes, the generator is primarily held accountable for the proper disposal. There are federal and state laws that apply to these wastes.

Non-hazardous solid waste disposal and transport is principally the responsibility of the local government to plan for the funding and the implementation by themselves or by using private business contractors.

The EPA requires that all municipal solid waste facilities have a minimum of two liners to contain the liquids from leaking out into the groundwater. The first must be an approved clay liner. The second must be an approved impervious membrane liner.

A great deal of waste is transported between the fifty states. A lot of waste is also shipped to other countries. This action is permitted by the Constitution's commerce clause and through mutual interstate and foreign trade agreements.

Comment: There are several outstanding government websites that are filled with outstanding charts, graphs, and data about the politics and science of solid waste management. All of these websites are common domain and can be used for school use.

Websites for further information:

- <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw07-fs.pdf>
- <http://www.deq.state.va.us/waste/solid.html>
- <http://www.deq.state.va.us/waste/hazardous.html>
- <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/export/sites/default/waste/pdf/swreport2007.pdf>
- http://www.deq.virginia.gov/export/sites/default/recycle/pdf/AnnualReport_RRR2007_Final.pdf

Another outstanding source is *Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling and Disposal in the United States: Facts and Figures for 2007*. This is one of the most recent documents with a lot of data and facts about the politics and science of solid waste management.