

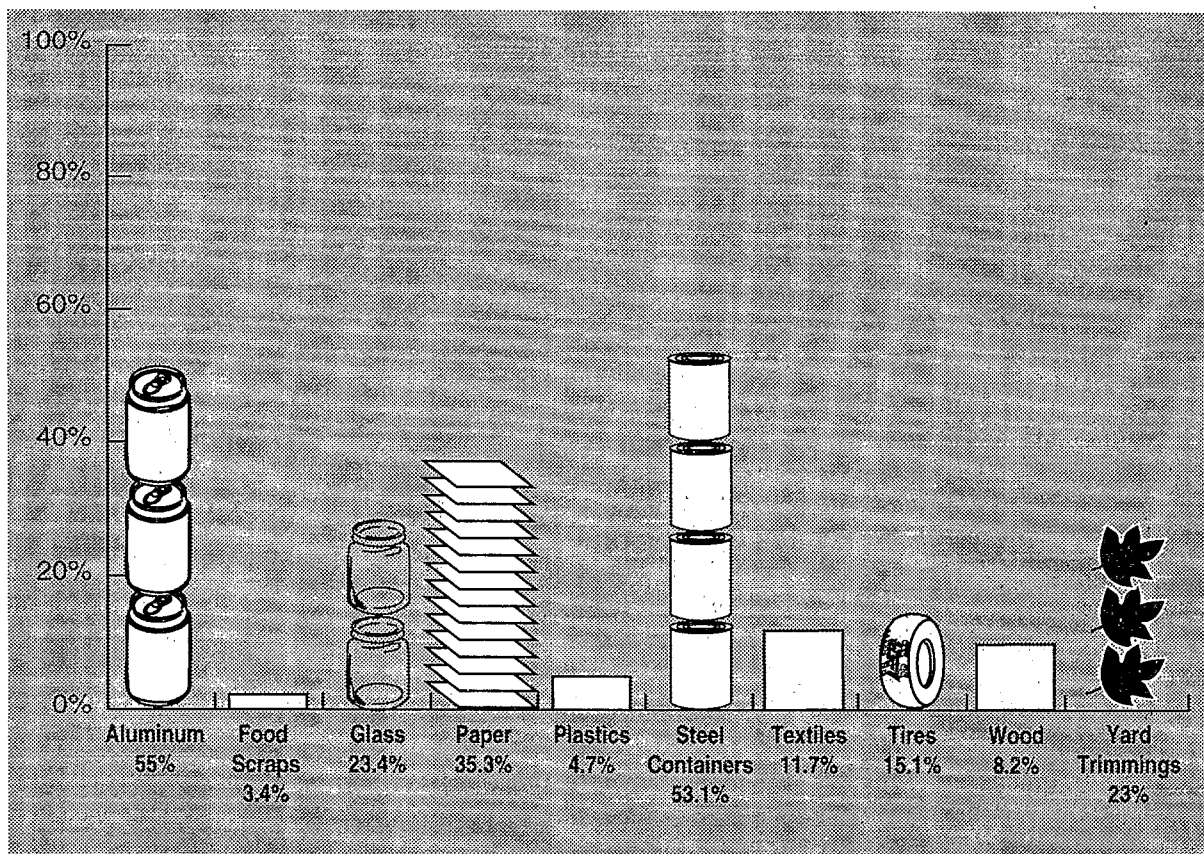


Environmental Fact Sheet

Recycling Municipal Solid Waste: 1995 Facts and Figures

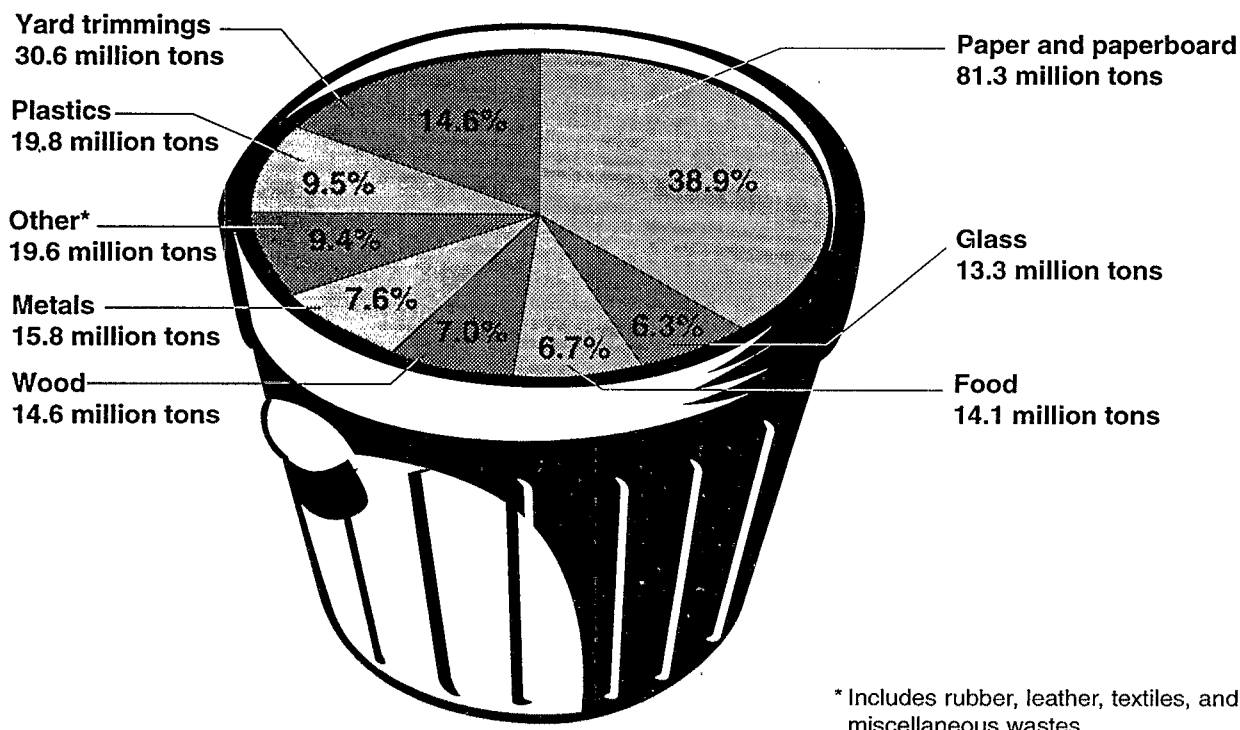
In the United States, we generated approximately 209 million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 1994—an average of 4.4 pounds per person per day. Although the total amount of MSW continues to rise each year, the per capita MSW generation rate is expected to remain constant through the year 2000 for two main reasons. First, while we continue to dispose of more products and packaging each year, an increasing amount of packaging is being lightweighted. Second, efforts such as backyard composting are beginning to reduce the amount of yard trimmings entering the waste stream. Recovery rates for recycling and composting continue to grow. In 1994, the nation's overall recycling rate was 24 percent—up 3 percent from the previous year. Composting of food scraps reached measurable proportions in 1994 for the first time ever. This fact sheet describes 10 of the primary components of the MSW stream, along with their generation rate, the percentage of the MSW stream they represent, and their recovery rate.

1994 Recovery Rates for Major MSW Components



Materials Generated in MSW by Weight, 1994

Total weight = 209.1 million tons



Aluminum



GENERATION: A total of 3.1 million tons of aluminum waste was generated in 1994. Aluminum containers and packaging, such as soft drink and beer cans, contributed 2.1 million tons.



PERCENT: Aluminum made up 1.5 percent of the total MSW generated in 1994.



RECOVERY: Approximately 65.5 percent of aluminum containers were recycled in 1994. The overall recycling rate for aluminum packaging was 55.0 percent in 1994.

Aluminum cans and other packaging comprise the largest source of aluminum in MSW. Because of their high market value, aluminum cans generally supply a large percentage of revenues for many municipal recycling programs. Most of the aluminum recovered from the waste stream is used to manufacture new cans.

Ferrous Metals



GENERATION: About 11.5 million tons of ferrous metal waste (e.g., iron and steel) was generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Ferrous metals constituted 5.5 percent of the MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: Overall, about 25.2 percent of ferrous metals in MSW were recycled in 1994. Approximately 53.1 percent of steel cans and 27.8 percent of steel packaging materials, such as strapping, were recycled.

Ferrous metals are the largest category of metals by weight in the MSW stream. Most ferrous metals in MSW are found in such durable goods as appliances, furniture, and tires. Steel cans and other packaging are the other source of ferrous metals in MSW.

Food Scraps



GENERATION: Nearly 14.1 million tons of food scraps were generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Food scraps comprised approximately 6.7 percent of the MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: In 1994, recovery of food scraps reached measurable proportions for the first time. Approximately 3.4 percent of food scraps were composted.

Food scraps include uneaten food and food preparation wastes from homes, commercial establishments such as restaurants, institutional sources such as school cafeterias, and industrial sources such as factory lunchrooms.

Glass



GENERATION: Approximately 13.3 million tons of glass waste was generated in 1994. Food and beverage containers made up 91 percent of this amount; the remainder came from products like cookware and glassware, home furnishings, and plate glass.



PERCENT: Glass constituted 6.3 percent of the MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: About 25.8 percent of all glass food and beverage containers were recycled in 1994. Glass had an overall recovery rate of 23.4 percent in 1994.

Most of the glass recovered in the United States is used in new glass containers. A portion is also used in fiberglass and "glasphalt" for highway construction.

Paper and Paperboard



GENERATION: Nearly 81.3 million tons of paper and paperboard waste was generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Paper and paperboard constitute the largest portion of the MSW stream, representing 38.9 percent in 1994.



RECOVERY: Paper had an overall recycling rate of 35.3 percent in 1994. About 55.3 percent of corrugated boxes, 45.3 percent of newspapers, 19.3 percent of books, 30 percent of magazines, and 42.5 percent of office papers were recycled in 1994.

Recovered paper can be used to make a variety of products, including copier paper, paper towels and napkins, corrugated boxes, and hydraulic mulch. Demand for recovered paper is growing, as more mills are processing recovered paper and consumers continue to demand recycled paper products for their homes and offices.

Plastics



GENERATION: Approximately 19.8 million tons of plastic waste was generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Plastics comprised 9.5 percent of the total MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: About 4.7 percent of all plastics were recycled in 1994, with plastic soda bottles being the most commonly recycled product (an estimated 50 percent were recovered).

Plastic containers and packaging comprise the largest portion of the plastic that ends up in the waste stream. Although the overall recovery of plastic is fairly small (about 4.7 percent), recovery of plastic soft drink, milk, and water bottles is increasing. Products made from recovered plastic bottles include drainage pipes, toys, carpet, filler for pillows and sleeping bags, and cassette casings.

Textiles



GENERATION: An estimated 6.6 million tons of textiles were generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Textiles made up nearly 3.2 percent of the MSW stream.



RECOVERY: About 11.7 percent of textiles were recovered from the MSW stream.

Textiles in MSW consist primarily of discarded clothing, although other sources include furniture, carpets, tires, footwear, and other nondurable goods such as sheets and towels. A significant amount of textiles is recovered for reuse but these reused garments eventually re-enter the waste stream, and are therefore not included in the recovery for recycling estimate above. Textiles that are considered permanently recovered from the waste stream include clothing and items such as sheets and pillowcases that are recovered for export or reprocessing.

Tires



GENERATION: Approximately 3.7 million tons of rubber tires (or 250 million scrap tires—about 1 tire per person in the United States) were generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Tires made up about 1.8 percent of the MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: In 1994, approximately 15.1 percent of scrap tires were recycled.

Because of the difficulties of disposing of scrap tires in landfills or waste combustors, most old tires generated in the United States each year are stockpiled. These huge stockpiles invite rodents and mosquitos and pose fire hazards. Scrap tires can be burned for energy or converted into molded rubber products, rubberized asphalt paving, and athletic surfaces.

Wood



GENERATION: A total of 14.6 million tons of wood materials were generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Wood materials constituted 7 percent of the MSW stream.



RECOVERY: Approximately 8.2 percent of total wood discards were recovered in 1994.

The sources of wood in MSW include furniture, wood packaging such as crates and pallets, and miscellaneous durables such as kitchen cabinets and other products. Recovery of wood pallets, usually by chipping, has been increasing along with recovery of other wood materials.

Yard Trimmings



GENERATION: Approximately 30.6 million tons of yard trimmings (including grass, leaves, and tree and brush trimmings) were generated in 1994.



PERCENT: Yard trimmings made up 14.6 percent of the MSW stream in 1994.



RECOVERY: In 1994, nearly 23 percent of yard trimmings were composted.

Composting of yard trimmings has grown significantly in the past few years. In 1994, composting of these materials contributed to the second largest fraction of total MSW recovery (after paper and paperboard) at 7 million tons. This is largely due to state and local efforts to divert yard trimmings from landfills.

Source of data for this fact sheet: U.S. EPA's *Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 1995 Update*, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. Data are from 1994.