



Environmental Fact Sheet

THE SOLID WASTE DILEMMA: UPDATING THE AGENDA FOR ACTION

BACKGROUND

In the late 1980s, national attention focused on the potential crisis in municipal solid waste management. The roving garbage barge became a symbol of our solid waste dilemma, and the "garbage gap"--the discrepancy between our growing volume of municipal solid waste and the capacity to deal with it--became a media catchword.

In response to a clear need for national leadership in facing our solid waste management challenges, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created the Municipal Solid Waste Task Force in 1988. Working with interested groups from all sectors of society, the Task Force developed a national strategy for improving our management of municipal solid waste entitled *The Solid Waste Dilemma: An Agenda for Action*. Input from the general public, interested trade associations, environmental groups, and government organizations helped to make the strategy a practical blueprint for action.

Since February of 1989, when the original *Agenda for Action* was published, the nation has made important progress toward the objectives and goals EPA established. EPA is dedicated to implementing the Federal portion of the goals and activities set forth in the *Agenda*, as well as facilitating progress nationwide. Significant actions have been taken by other government agencies, corporations, public interest groups and private citizens across the nation. To build on this progress and focus national direction in the 1990s, EPA is now revisiting the *Agenda for Action*.

ACTION

In updating the *Agenda for Action*, EPA will take a look at how various sectors of our society have progressed over the past year in addressing the garbage problem. The update will highlight progress made, identify

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challenges remaining, and enhance the nation's strategy for meeting those challenges.

The new document, entitled *The Solid Waste Dilemma: Solutions for the 90s*, will emphasize the importance of the integrated waste management approach set forth in the original *Agenda*. Under this approach, communities tailor waste management systems to meet their distinctive needs, drawing on the elements of a three-tiered hierarchy of waste management options. The first and preferred option is source reduction, which reduces the amount and toxicity of waste before it is produced. The second option in the hierarchy is recycling and reuse of waste materials. Finally, combustion and landfilling of nonrecyclables should be considered. A complementary mix of the elements of this hierarchy will effectively meet the waste management needs of communities nationwide.

Solutions for the 90s will also explore how our society can reach the following specific objectives:

- fostering integrated solutions;
- reducing the quantity and toxicity of waste generated;
- enhancing markets of secondary materials;
- increasing the supply of recovered materials available for recycling;
- ensuring environmentally sound waste management facilities; and
- instilling an environmental ethic in our children and in our society as a whole.

We're all part of the problem, and we can all be part of the solution. The responsibility for meeting our national solid waste management goals rests collectively with all levels of government, the waste management industry, consumers, public interest groups, businesses, manufacturers, and distributors. In our role of national leadership, EPA is working to facilitate efforts made by each of these groups, and to foster information sharing and cooperation as we work toward lasting solutions for our environmental problems.

CONTACT

EPA expects *Solutions for the 90s* (EPA/530-SW-90-058) to be available in early fall. For copies, or for more information about EPA's solid waste management programs, contact the RCRA/Superfund Hotline Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. EST. The national toll-free number is (800) 424-9346, or TDD (800) 553-7672 for the hearing impaired. In Washington, D.C., the number is 382-3000 or TDD 475-9652. Send written orders to: RCRA Information Center (RIC), Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste (OS-305), 401 M Street, S.W., Washington D.C. 20460.