

Solid waste – part of MTCA’s mission

Reducing waste is often seen as a personal virtue. We are told to reduce, reuse and recycle. What gets left out of that formula is the fact that recycling, composting and diverting waste play an equally important role by reducing the generation of toxic gases and greenhouse gas emissions at Washington’s landfills.

Decomposing organic material in landfills generates methane, an explosive gas, carbon dioxide, toxic air emissions such as mercury, and, of course, odors. Collectively, recycling, composting and diversion prevent more than 8,200 tons of hazardous material from contaminating our state’s landfills each year.

Because of these significant threats to human health and the environment, the Washington Department of Ecology uses funds from the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA) for Coordinated Prevention Grants to support recycling, composting and diverting waste. Additional funding comes from Washington’s Waste Reduction, Recycling, and Litter Control Account.

Reducing toxics by improving management of solid waste has been part of MTCA’s mission since the beginning. Although MTCA has become identified with Washington’s industrial cleanup sites, in fact, a major goal of 1988 citizen’s initiative that established the account was to fix problems at leaking and contaminated solid waste landfills.

MTCA funds were essential in cleaning up and closing those landfills, and continue to be used for ongoing monitoring at those sites. Support from MTCA funding has led to safer and better-designed landfills and improved regulatory oversight of landfills.

Continuing toxic challenges with solid waste

Today, 13 landfills in Washington exceed groundwater quality standards. Two are under MTCA cleanup orders and receive funding for remedial action. Two more are under cleanup orders, but do not receive remedial action funding. And Ecology is negotiating cleanups at two others.

At six of these sites, landfill gases such as methane are the primary cause of contamination. Landfill gases are a contributing factor for groundwater contamination at all 13 sites.

WHY IT MATTERS

In 1988, Washington voters approved creation of the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA).

MTCA supports core work at the state and local government level for:

- Cleaning up contaminated land, air, and water.
- Reducing the number and severity of toxic releases.
- Managing solid and hazardous wastes.
- Water and environmental health protection and monitoring.
- Advising people about toxic threats and ways to reduce their exposure to toxics.

Contact information

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More information

Solid waste management –

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/nav/mgt.html

Recycling data -

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/solidwastedata

Organic materials –

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/nav/organic.html

Special accommodations

If you need this document in a format for the visually impaired, call the Waste 2 Resources program at 360-407-6900.

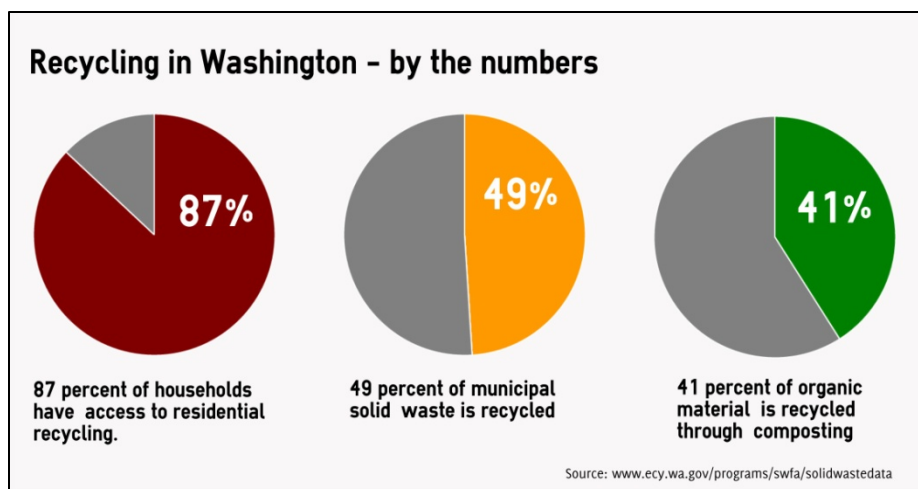
Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

New landfill design standards include systems to collect landfill gas and contaminated liquids. Standards allow solid waste companies to stop leaks to the environment before a landfill becomes a cleanup site. Washington's largest landfills collect methane gas rather than flaring it to the air. The gas is converted to compressed natural gas, which can power trucks or be used for heating or power generation.

Washington, a leader in solid waste management

Our state is a national leader in recycling, composting and diverting waste from landfills.

In 2013, 8 million tons of material in Washington was collected for recycling or otherwise diverted from landfills. Recycling that material, instead of creating new products from virgin materials, saved the energy equivalent of 1 billion gallons of gasoline, or 128 trillion BTUs of energy - enough to power 1.3 million homes.



The fine print

A number of rules and regulations address the use of MTCA funds to support solid waste management:

- [RCW 70.105D, Model Toxics Control Act](#) authorizes the use of MTCA funds for solid waste management and disposal.
- [RCW 70.105D.070\(3\)\(4\), Toxics Control Accounts](#) authorizes the use of MTCA funding to fund the state's responsibility for solid waste planning, management, regulation, enforcement, technical assistance, and public education required under chapter [70.95](#) RCW in addition to providing financial assistance for local programs and for solid waste plans and programs.
- [RCW 70.95 Solid waste management – Reduction and Recycling](#)
 - [70.95.010](#) (10) (Findings and Priorities) establishes a goal to eliminate yard debris in landfills by 2012 where able. [70.95.080](#) (20) (a) requires local governments to address organic debris such as food and yard waste when planning service for their residents.
 - [70.95.130](#) provides authority for Ecology to give financial aid to counties for the solid waste system, which can include composting activities and facilities as part of waste reduction and recycling activities. [WAC 173-312, Coordinated Prevention Grants](#), further defines these grants.
 - [70.95.290](#) requires Ecology to evaluate yard waste and other biodegradable materials in waste stream evaluations and as per [70.95.295](#), incorporate findings in our state solid waste management plans.
 - [WAC 173-350, Solid Waste Handling Standards](#), establishes the regulatory program that local governments must follow to safely manage their solid waste system.

Sources: Model Toxics Control Accounts: Annual Report Fiscal Year 2012, Annual Solid Waste in Washington State Status Report, Washington Statewide Waste Characterization Study (2009).