

The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer Solid Waste Factsheet



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Background

- Solid waste results from various sources, such as animal wastes, hazardous wastes, industrial and non-infectious medical wastes, food wastes, mineral waste, and nonhazardous waste.
- Public health concerns regarding solid waste include aesthetics (e.g., the visual appearance of many collection sites and odors associated with solid waste), the potential for groundwater contamination, an increase in vectors (rodents, insects, etc.) that may spread diseases, and other issues regarding sanitation.
- Municipal solid waste includes garbage (highly decomposable objects, such as food), trash (bulky items, such as tree branches or old appliances), and rubbish (slowly decomposable items, such as paper, glass, or metal objects).
- The majority of municipal solid waste ends up in landfills—approximately 135 million tons in 2008.
- The production of methane gas and leachates, or liquids that contain potentially harmful substances, are some of the health concerns associated with landfills.
- Recycling is an important method to manage municipal solid waste, and can save energy, reduce greenhouse gases, and conserve natural resources.

Board of Health Actions

- Assist in determining the means for collecting, storing, and transferring of wastes and the location of landfills.
- Oversee the conditions and facilities of solid waste disposal.
- Develop policy around abandoned landfills; open dumps; tire repositories/reservoirs; special wastes, such as medical wastes; construction/demolition debris; and sludge disposal.
- With input from the community, clearly define goals for the waste collection system, periodically review the system's performance, and regularly evaluate and adjust the system's goals to conform to the changing needs in the community.
- Work actively with recycling groups to promote and educate about recycling in their communities.

Resources for Continuing Education

- National Association of Local Boards of Health. (2011). Solid Waste. In *The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer* (2nd ed.).
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Solid Waste. Available at <http://www.epa.gov/osw/>

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