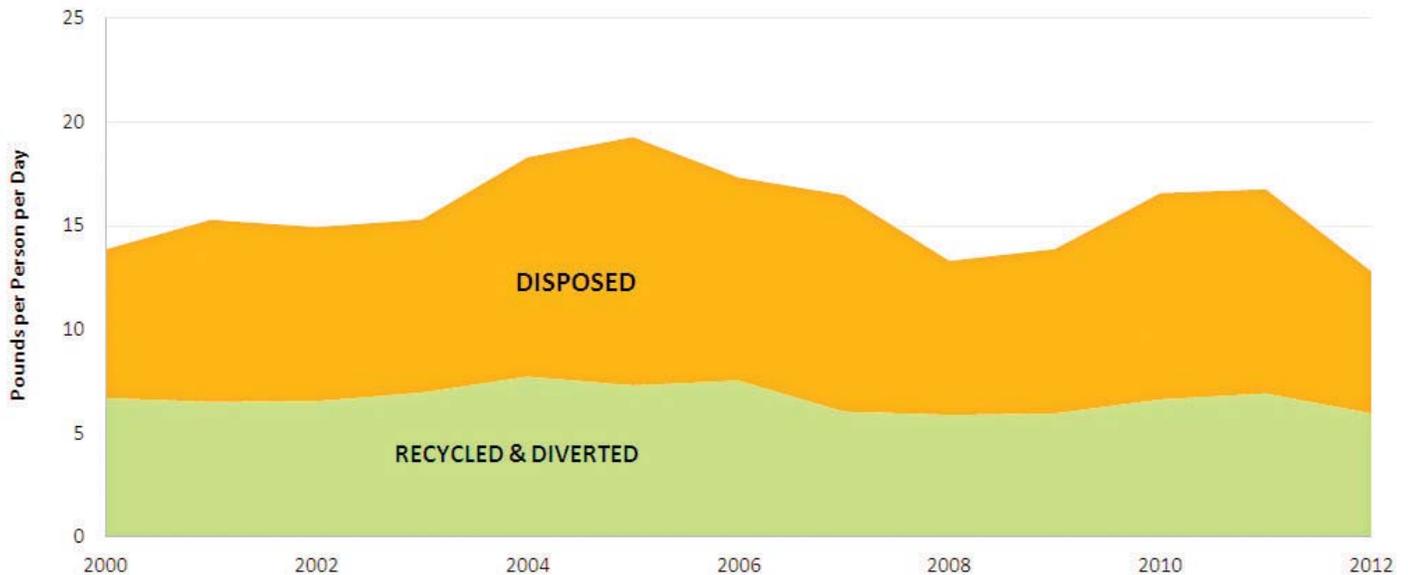


# Pierce County Environmental Health 2014



## Waste Solid Waste Generated



**Data Source:** Washington State Department of Ecology. Data include residential, commercial, and industrial waste created in Pierce County.

In 2012, we recycled less than **50%** of our waste—we can do better! Food waste makes up about **30%** of our residential and commercial waste.

## WHY CARE?

### Benefits

- Saving raw materials and the energy needed to extract, transport, process, manufacture, and dispose of products. Recycling paper saved about 8.5 million trees and 3.5 billion gallons of water in Washington state, in 2012.<sup>1</sup>
- Saving money: pay less for smaller waste disposal containers or loads, buy less stuff and buy used or barter.
- Recycling prevented about 765 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per person in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

### Hazards

- Transportation of waste contributes to traffic, noise, and air pollution.
- Burning garbage, yard and construction debris contributes to air pollution and is illegal.

- Liquids that leach from landfills may contain nitrates and other toxics.
- Decomposing waste produces greenhouse gases.
- Plastic bottles and other waste end up in our lakes, rivers, Puget Sound, and marine life. Plastics break down into microplastics, which are eaten by plankton and concentrated in our marine food web.<sup>3</sup>

### Exposure

- Breathing air downwind from waste transportation routes and facilities.
- Drinking water with contaminants that leach from leaking landfills. Landfills built before 1985 did not have the modern liners and liquid collection systems to prevent groundwater contamination that are now required.
- Before the 1970's, many people commonly dumped their trash in open areas. In Pierce County there were more than 90 old landfills and dump sites around the county.<sup>4</sup>

- Landfill gas is vented, burned off, or turned into energy. The closed landfills in Tacoma and Puyallup turned landfill gas into energy when it was profitable to do so. At the current landfill in Graham about half of the gas is turned into energy.<sup>5</sup>

## Human health impacts

- Breathing or swallowing hazardous materials that get into the air or water can cause dizziness, headaches, cancer and other illnesses.
- Fine particulate matter contributes to respiratory illnesses, heart disease and cancer.

## Who's most vulnerable?

- People living downwind from waste transportation routes and facilities.
- People drinking water contaminated by old, leaking landfills.

## Economic impacts

- In 2011, residents in our county disposed of about 360 pounds of waste per person. If sold at market prices, recyclable materials in that waste would have a value of \$47 million or about \$60 per person.<sup>6</sup>
- When the landfill in Graham fills up in 25 years or more, waste disposal costs are likely to rise.<sup>7</sup>
- Increased disposal costs may lead to increased litter and illegal dumping, which in turn costs property owners and government agencies.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### Policy actions

- In 1985, landfill regulations became more protective of environmental health.
- The City of Tacoma has curbside recycling since 1989. The City offers food waste recycling for residents and businesses.
- Pierce County switched to single-family curbside recycling for residents in 2004. Since then recycling has increased to almost 50 pounds, per month, per household.<sup>8</sup>

### Personal actions

- Recycle or compost food waste at work, school, and home.
  - o Tacoma businesses and residents find out how by calling (253) 502-2289.
  - o Find out how to compost by calling (253) 798-2179.
- Donate good canned, bulk, and other edible food to your local food bank or the Emergency Food Network. Find out how by calling (253) 584-1040.

Reduce waste and save money at work, school, home, and everywhere!



Recycling bins (David Rurik).

- Precycle: think before you buy.
- Buy things that are repairable and fix them: [www.ifixit.org](http://www.ifixit.org).
- Get a smaller garbage container.
- Buy products that have less packaging, are reusable and less hazardous.
  - o Don't buy bottled water—ask for water bottle filling stations at work, parks, and other places.

Properly dispose of products at work, school and home.

- Find out where to safely dispose of:
  - o Oil and other household hazardous waste at [www.piercecountywa.org/hhw](http://www.piercecountywa.org/hhw) and [www.tpchd.org/hazwaste](http://www.tpchd.org/hazwaste).
  - o Medications at [www.takebackyourmeds.org](http://www.takebackyourmeds.org).
- Find out where to recycle:
  - o TVs, computers, and other electronics at [www.ecyclewashington.org](http://www.ecyclewashington.org).
  - o Other items at [www.piercecountywa.org/recycling](http://www.piercecountywa.org/recycling).

Pet waste contains bacteria and other microorganisms that can make people sick, especially children.

- o Pick up pet waste, bag it and put it in the trash.

**Green Mountain Coffee uses employee engagement, incentives, and other Global Reporting Initiative guidelines to divert about 83% of waste at U.S. facilities.<sup>9</sup>**

1, 2 Focus on the Benefits of Recycling, Washington State Department of Ecology, February 2014.

3 Microplastics in the marine environment, Marine Pollution Bulletin, 2011.

4 Closed Landfill Study Pierce County, Washington, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, December 2010.

5 Washington State Department of Ecology ECOConnect Blog, March 21, 2014.

6 Beyond Waste Progress Report for 2011, Washington State Department of Ecology.

7 Closed Landfill Study Pierce County, Washington, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, December 2010.

8 Single-Cart Curbside Recycling: 2 ½ Years, Pierce County Department of Public Works and Utilities, 2008.

9 Green Mountain 2013 Fiscal Sustainability Report Executive Summary and Global Reporting Initiative Index.