

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Program Snapshot

WasteWise: Climate Benefits From Reducing Waste

“WasteWise reminds us that we are not just recycling for the department, but also for the community at large. Tracking the data helps us determine if we are in line with our recycling program goals and are actually increasing diversion, as well as reducing GHG emissions.”

Karen Higgins
Recycling Manager
Los Angeles Department
of Water and Power

WasteWise, which promotes waste prevention and recycling practices (jointly referred to as waste reduction), is one of EPA’s premier partnership programs. Its focus is threefold: waste prevention, recycling, and buying and/or manufacturing recycled-content products. In addition to cost savings and efficiencies, waste reduction has positive effects on climate change. The manufacture and distribution of products, and the subsequent management of solid waste, can contribute to the formation of greenhouse gases. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as for other environmental benefits, EPA encourages waste reduction efforts through its WasteWise program.

What is WasteWise?

Since January 1994, EPA has been working in partnership with American businesses; federal, state, local, and tribal governments; and institutions to reduce municipal solid waste. Presently, more than 1,250 organizations are WasteWise partners. Partners are located all across the country and represent a variety of business, civic, and industrial sectors, ranging from small local governments to Fortune 1000 corporations. WasteWise also includes over 130 endorsers, primarily associations and local governments, who work to promote the program and encourage new partners to join.

Through the WasteWise program, partners make a voluntary commitment to implement or expand a solid waste reduction program with three complementary components:

- **Preventing waste.** The cornerstone of WasteWise is waste prevention, which means using less material to do the same job or produce the same product. WasteWise partners commit to implementing three significant waste prevention activities of their choice.
- **Recycling collection.** By collecting recyclables, WasteWise partners divert materials from disposal. They commit to initiate, expand, or improve internal programs to collect recyclables. For example, offices may add new materials to an existing program or boost recycling rates by educating employees or the community.
- **Buying or manufacturing recycled-content products.** WasteWise partners can play a key role in integrating recycled-content materials into consumer markets. They commit to purchasing products with recycled content. Manufacturers may also raise the percentage of postconsumer materials in the products they make.



WasteWise partners design their own solid waste reduction programs, tailored to meet their needs and operations. Partners monitor their progress during a 3-year period and report annually to EPA on their accomplishments. The WasteWise program helps participating organizations discover waste reduction opportunities and set waste reduction goals. Partners have access (through a toll-free helpline) to WasteWise representatives, who provide personalized assistance, and to a wide range of waste reduction publications and electronic support services. EPA also publicly recognizes individual organizations and program successes.

How Does WasteWise Help Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions?

The three cornerstones of WasteWise—waste prevention, recycling collection, and buying/manufacturing products with recycled content—are among the most effective ways to reduce the greenhouse gases traceable to municipal solid waste.

WasteWise partners divert millions of tons of material from disposal each year. They also attain higher levels of efficiency by using only the materials they really need. And as these organizations prevent more waste and recycle more materials, fewer greenhouse gases are emitted into the atmosphere.

Waste prevention, in particular, can greatly reduce the emission of

greenhouse gases by conserving raw materials and the energy expended to retrieve, process, and manufacture them into products. In addition, waste prevention keeps materials out of landfills and incinerators. Certain materials generate greenhouse gases as they degrade in landfills or burn in incinerators. Overall, waste prevention provides more climate change benefits than any other waste management option.

By boosting their recycling collection efforts, WasteWise partners keep valuable materials out of landfills and incinerators. In particular, many organizations have increased their recycling of office paper and corrugated containers. Keeping paper products out of landfills cuts methane emissions. Recycling used paper saves energy and can leave more trees standing in the forest. Trees take large amounts of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and store it in wood.

WasteWise partners are also encouraged to manufacture or buy products made from recycled materials. This helps ensure that recovered materials, rather than raw materials, are used in manufacturing processes. Typically, manufacturing products from recycled rather than virgin materials consumes less energy.

To help partners understand how they can help reduce the risk of climate change and obtain recognition for their activities, a new WasteWise Climate Change Initiative has been launched. This initiative explicitly promotes waste-related climate change reductions by highlighting the rela-

tionship between waste and climate change as a key element of the WasteWise message, and delivering new climate change outreach and educational tools for planning and implementing “win-win” solutions. The WasteWise Climate Change Initiative also provides additional recognition and publicity to partners who pursue waste-related GHG reductions.

WasteWise is already having measurable impacts on climate change. In 2000, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), a WasteWise partner, recycled 76 percent of its waste, including paper, yard trimmings, plastics, and wood. This reduced GHG emissions by roughly 4,000 metric tons of carbon equivalent (MTCE, the basic unit of measure for greenhouse gases). Similarly, the Seydel Companies have prevented the disposal of 813 tons of high density polyethylene (HDPE) through packaging waste reductions and changes to their manufacturing processes. These changes have resulted in the reduction of approximately 400 MTCE. Likewise, the Battelle Memorial Institute of Columbus, Ohio, reduced 443 MTCE by implementing a comprehensive employee education campaign on reducing waste. Notable WasteWise success stories are growing in all sectors, and more are in the making each day.

For more information on WasteWise, call the WasteWise helpline at 1 800 EPA-WISE (372-9473) or go to www.epa.gov/wastewise. For more information on climate change, including how to estimate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from solid waste management activities using EPA's WASTE Reduction Model (WARM), you can access EPA's Climate Change and Waste Web site at www.epa.gov/mswclimate.

