



# Solid Waste in Rhode Island

## DEFINITIONS

**Solid Waste:** Includes materials such as durable and nondurable goods, containers, packaging, yard debris, and food scraps. Solid waste can be from municipal sources (MSW) or commercial sources (CSW) and excludes industrial, hazardous and construction waste<sup>1</sup>

**Sanitary Landfill:** An engineered method of disposing of trash on land in a manner that protects the environment, by spreading the waste in thin layers, compacting it to the smallest practical volume and covering it with approved material by the end of each working day<sup>3</sup>

**Tipping Fee:** Price charged to deliver solid waste to a landfill or recycling facility. The "gate rate" is the charge to customers without a disposal contract.

RI Municipal Tipping Fee = \$32/ton

RI Commercial Tipping Fee (average) = \$50/ton

RI Gate Rate = \$75/ton

In RI, we use the term "Municipal Solid Waste" (MSW) to refer to residentially generated waste, but it may also include waste from schools and municipal offices, like Town Hall, Police, and Fire stations.

RI law requires all entities that generate waste to separate their waste into recyclables and non-recyclables.

MSW is collected by local cities and towns, either through a hauler under contract to the municipality, or by city or town employees. All MSW is required by RI law to be brought to the RIRRC, or a facility designated by RIRRC.

Commercial Solid Waste (CSW) is collected by private haulers, and is not required to be disposed of in RI.

## Who Does What?

**RI Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC):** RIRRC is a quasi-state agency (not a department of the state) that owns and operates the state's centralized waste facilities, located in Johnston.

**Local Cities and Towns:** RI's municipalities control how waste generated within their borders is collected.

**Private Industry:** Independent haulers, recyclers, transfer station owners, and composters manage specific sectors of waste (such as construction and demolition debris, yard waste, and paper and packaging), contributing to the statewide waste management system and state economy.

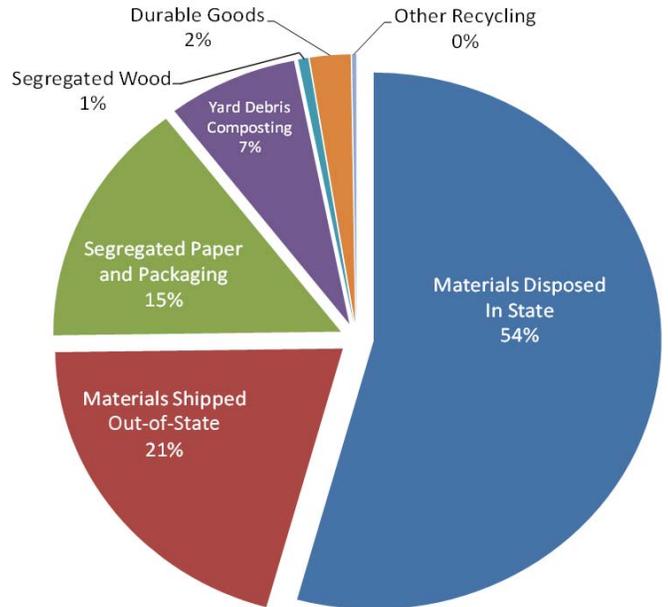
**RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) & US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):** DEM is responsible for issuing the permits that allow RIRRC to operate the Central Landfill and its related operations. EPA is responsible for ensuring that the Superfund site at the Central Landfill (the first section, or Phase 1) is managed properly.

**RI General Assembly:** The General Assembly sets the disposal fees for municipalities, currently at \$32 per ton of disposed trash.

**RI State Planning Program (SPP):** SPP prepares and maintains plans for the physical, economic, and social development of RI.

**Individuals:** Each Rhode Islander is responsible for reducing the amount of waste we produce, and for recycling or composting waste that is unavoidable.

## Current Disposition of 1.2M tons of RI Solid Waste

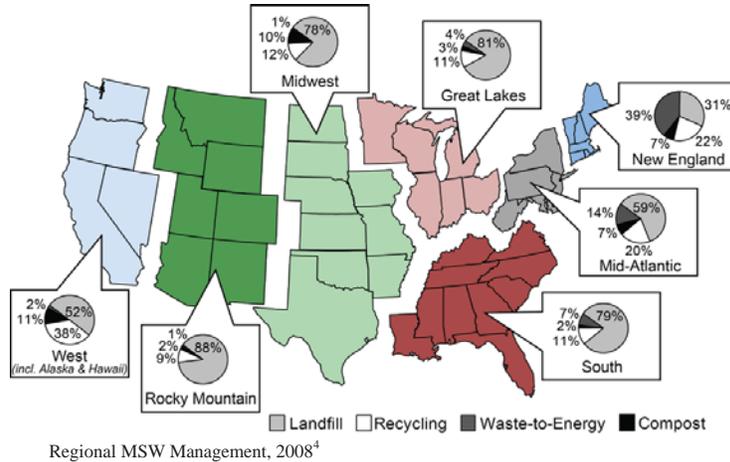


1. Center for Sustainable Systems, University of Michigan. 2013. "Municipal Solid Waste Factsheet." Pub. No. CSS04-15.  
 2. CalRecycle, "Waste Prevention Terms and Definitions", <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/reducewaste/define.htm#Recycling>  
 3. European Environment Agency, GEMET Thesaurus, <http://www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet/concept?ns=1&cp=7438>  
 4. Biocycle and the Earth Engineering Center of Columbia University (2010), The State of Garbage in America 2010; Center for Sustainable Systems, University of Michigan. 2013. "Municipal Solid Waste Factsheet." Pub. No. CSS04-15.  
 5. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "U.S. Recycling Economic Information Project," <http://www.epa.gov/wastes/conservation/tools/rmd/rei-rw/index.htm>



# Solid Waste in RI, Continued

## How is Waste Being Managed Nationally?



In RI, we currently rely on a combination of landfilling, recycling, and composting to manage our MSW. Because CSW can be disposed out of state, some CSW is disposed at waste-to-energy facilities in MA and CT.

In 2012, approximately 750,000 tons of Rhode Island generated waste required disposal. At current disposal levels, the Central Landfill will be full in 25 years.

## DEFINITIONS

### Waste Prevention:

Actions or choices that prevent the generation of waste<sup>2</sup>

### Reuse:

Using an object or material again, either for its original purpose or for a similar purpose, without significantly altering the physical form of the object or material<sup>2</sup>

### Recycling:

Altering the physical form of an object or material and manufacturing a new object from the altered material<sup>2</sup>

### Composting:

The biological decomposition of organic materials such as leaves, grass clippings, brush, and food waste into a soil amendment. Composting is a form of recycling<sup>2</sup>

### Waste Diversion:

The combined efforts of reuse and recycling practices<sup>2</sup>

## Solid Waste is a Valuable Commodity

- **RI sells recyclables all over the world.** RIRRC shares the profits made from the sale of municipal recyclables back with each city and town, according to how many tons of recycling they deliver. In 2013, the municipal profit share totaled \$780,000. In prior years, that number swelled to \$2,100,000.
- **Trash is also a commodity.** When prices fall at waste-to-energy facilities in MA and CT, CSW from Rhode Island travels there for disposal. Because the tipping fee for CSW is higher than the fee for MSW, the loss of commercial tipping fees has an adverse affect on RIRRC-funded programs.
- **Diversion of waste boosts the economy.** Diversion to businesses such as scrap yards, swap shops, second-hand stores, or reuse centers, is critical to boosting the local economy and providing much needed consumer goods at reasonable prices. For every one job in landfilling/incineration, there are five jobs in reuse and recycling.<sup>5</sup>

## What are the Key Issues?

- **The Central Landfill is a shrinking, finite resource.** What programs and policies should we explore or adopt that will significantly reduce the amount of RI generated solid trash in order to increase landfill life?
- **What's missing from the system?** What infrastructure investments are required, both in the short and long run, to reduce solid waste, and to manage the solid waste that remains in an efficient, equitable, and environmentally responsible manner?
- **Trash and Recycling services aren't free.** How do we fund both the necessary infrastructure investments as well as the ongoing costs of the system?