

Community concern or issue: *Reducing Solid Waste* generation

How does this issue impact citizen health or the environment?

In 2008, Americans generated about 250 million tons of trash and recycled and composted 83 million tons, or 33.2%, of this material. On average, we recycled and composted 1.5 pounds of our individual waste generation of 4.5 pounds per person per day. EPA estimated residential waste (including waste from apartment houses) to be 55 to 65 percent of total municipal solid waste (MSW) generated. Waste from commercial and institutional locations, such as schools, hospitals, and businesses, amounted to 35 to 45 percent. By not reducing, reusing, or recycling solid waste, we waste natural resources, energy, and money. Reusable and recyclable wastes are buried (shortening the life of landfills) or burned unnecessarily.

When considering the entire life cycle of products we use and throw away, it takes raw materials, chemicals, and energy to develop and ship a product. A product's true cost includes greenhouse gases emitted in its creation as well as its use and disposal. Greenhouse gases include pollutants that potentially cause acid rain, smog, and contaminated waterways.

Large amounts of energy can be saved by recycling rather than harvesting virgin raw materials. For example, recycling aluminum can cut energy consumption by 95%; plastics by 70%; steel by 60%; paper by 40%; and glass by 30%.

Existing controls or standards

No local laws mandate business or public solid waste recycling. However, EPA has issued a nationwide challenge for consumers, businesses, organizations, and industries to recycle 35% of America's municipal solid waste; currently, 19 states have laws for recycling electronics waste, and several states promote (not law) waste reduction, recycling, and responsible management of solid wastes.

How is this issue impacting Salina?

From the data available, it is reported that Salina recycles, on average, only 10 percent of its waste, even though curb-side recycling is offered, when 30 percent is the national average. According to statistics taken from a 2004 study, major waste streams to the landfill include food waste, plastic, paper, corrugated and Kraft paper, and wood. Many of these items are recyclable.

What factors and behaviors contribute to this problem?

Citizens and businesses may lack awareness about the impacts of wastes to the environment and the life cycle costs (in natural resources, energy, and generated pollutants) to produce all the items we use daily. They may not realize the benefits of practicing the three Rs—reduce, reuse, and recycle. The city is limiting curb-side recycling to 900 residents for an extra fee. The community is at or near its capacity for processing the recyclables that it receives.

Potential solutions – how can the community help with this issue?

The community needs to add recycling service centers or expand the existing ones. It must continue to promote waste minimization and recycling through educational programs for children and adults. It can seek a community-wide waste reduction goal mandate or initiative, and offer incentives of some sort to motivate industries to decrease the waste they generate and increase their recycling efforts. Other options perhaps include expanding the curb-side recycling program, offering more recycling drop-off locations, and offering more recycling opportunities at community events such as the Smoky Hill River Festival.