

Community concern or issue: *Residential Compostable Waste* going to our local landfill

How does this issue impact citizen health or the environment?

Yard trimmings and food residuals make up 24% of the United States' and 23% of Salina's municipal solid waste stream. These materials, especially food wastes, are often associated with offensive odors and pests, which can carry diseases into human populations near landfills. When these materials are disposed in landfills, breakdown or biodegradation is very slow due to the compression of the materials. However, when organic materials are processed by aerobic and anaerobic bacteria in the landfill, methane and carbon dioxide (each 40-60% by volume), as well as very small amounts (0.01-0.6 % by volume) of toxic organic gases, are released as by-products into the local atmosphere. Although these are both potent greenhouse gases, methane is 20 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere. Composting organic waste has the potential to reduce the landfill waste stream by up to 23 percent based on a Salina waste stream study. Waste reduction and recycling prevent greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pollutants, save energy, conserve resources, and reduce the need for new disposal facilities.

Existing controls or standards

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment promotes composting as an alternative to landfill disposal of organics. Kansas administrative regulations define composting as a controlled process of microbial degradation of organic material into a stable, nuisance-free, humus-like product. There are no laws or mandates which require household recycling of compostable wastes. Salina offers curb-side recycling of yard wastes but not food wastes.

How is this issue impacting Salina?

In a 2004 study by the city of Salina, compostable waste was 23 percent (by weight) of the municipal solid waste landfill. Adding in wood waste and paper and paperboard product to food residuals and yard trimmings makes up more than two-thirds of the solid waste stream in the United States and 61% of Salina's landfill. In 2007, 245.1 million tons of municipal solid wastes were generated in the United States. In 2004, the Salina landfill received 80,000 tons.

What factors and behaviors contribute to this problem?

Citizen lack of awareness about the impact of these wastes on the environment, how these wastes impact the life of landfills, and the benefits of composting result in less participation than necessary to protect our landfill capacity. Also we do not have a community program for food residue recycling.

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

Composting offers the obvious benefits of resource efficiency and creating a useful product from organic waste that would otherwise have been landfilled. Implementing an education campaign can help citizens understand how they can easily create a residential composting program. Providing affordable composting units along with guidelines for composting can encourage citizens to begin experiencing the benefits of backyard composting.

NOTE: This fact sheet was taken from an issue paper developed by Marilyn Marietta, Betsy Marietta, and Stephanie Weckel.

The detailed fact sheet can be accessed at www.sbeap.org/CARE