Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2018 Fact Sheet

Assessing Trends in Materials Generation and Management in the United States

December 2020

Introduction

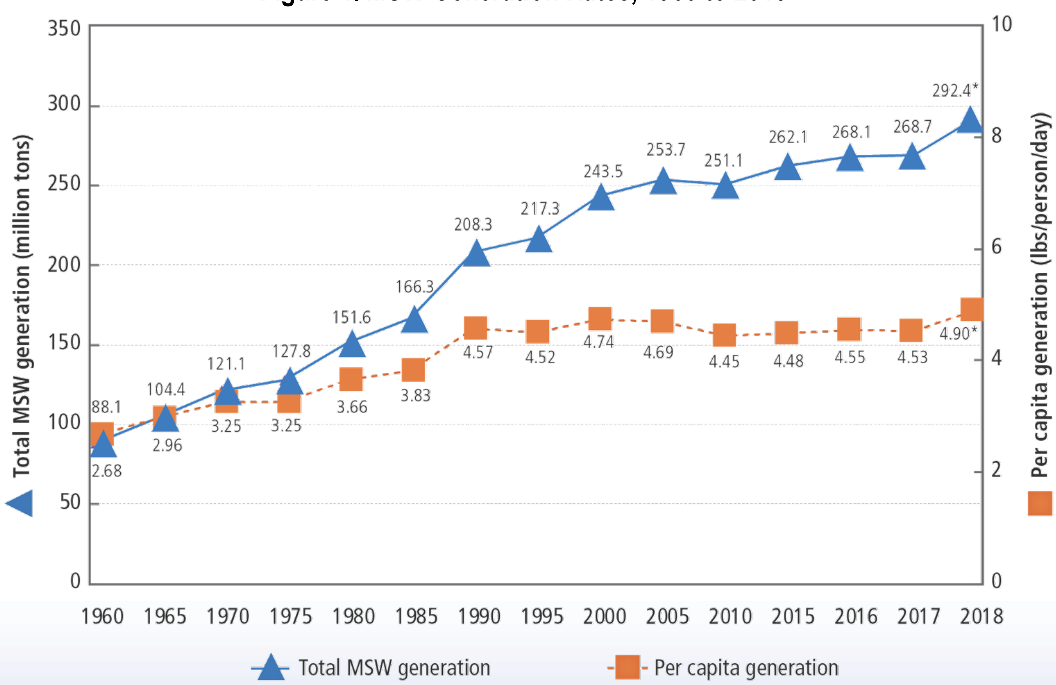
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has collected and reported data on the generation and disposition of municipal solid waste (MSW) in the United States for more than 35 years. This information is used to measure the success of materials management programs across the country and to characterize the national waste stream. These facts and figures are based on the most recent information, which is from calendar year 2018.

In 2018, in the United States, approximately 292 million tons (U.S. short tons unless specified) of MSW were generated (See Figure 1). Of the MSW generated, approximately 69 million tons were recycled and 25 million tons were composted. Together, about 94 million tons were recycled or composted, equivalent to a 32.1 percent recycling and composting rate (See Figure 2). In addition, about 18 million tons of food (6.1 percent) were processed through other food management pathways (See Figure 3, Table 1 and text box page 5). More than 34 million tons of MSW (11.8 percent) were combusted with energy recovery. Finally, more than 146 million tons (50.0 percent) were landfilled (See Figure 3 and Table 1).

Information about waste generation and management is an important foundation for managing materials. EPA's Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) approach refers to the use and reuse of materials in the most productive and sustainable way across their entire lifecycle. Through SMM, EPA helps to meet the material needs of the future by providing methods to decrease environmental impacts of materials use while increasing economic competitiveness.

This report analyzes MSW trends in generation and management, materials and products, and economic indicators affecting MSW. It also includes a section on the generation and management of construction and demolition (C&D) debris, which is not a part of MSW, but comprises a significant portion of the non-hazardous solid waste stream.

Figure 1. MSW Generation Rates, 1960 to 2018*



*MSW generation rose considerably from 2017 to 2018 mainly because EPA enhanced its food measurement methodology to more fully account for all the ways wasted food is managed throughout the food system.

Figure 2. MSW Recycling and Composting Rate, 1960 to 2018

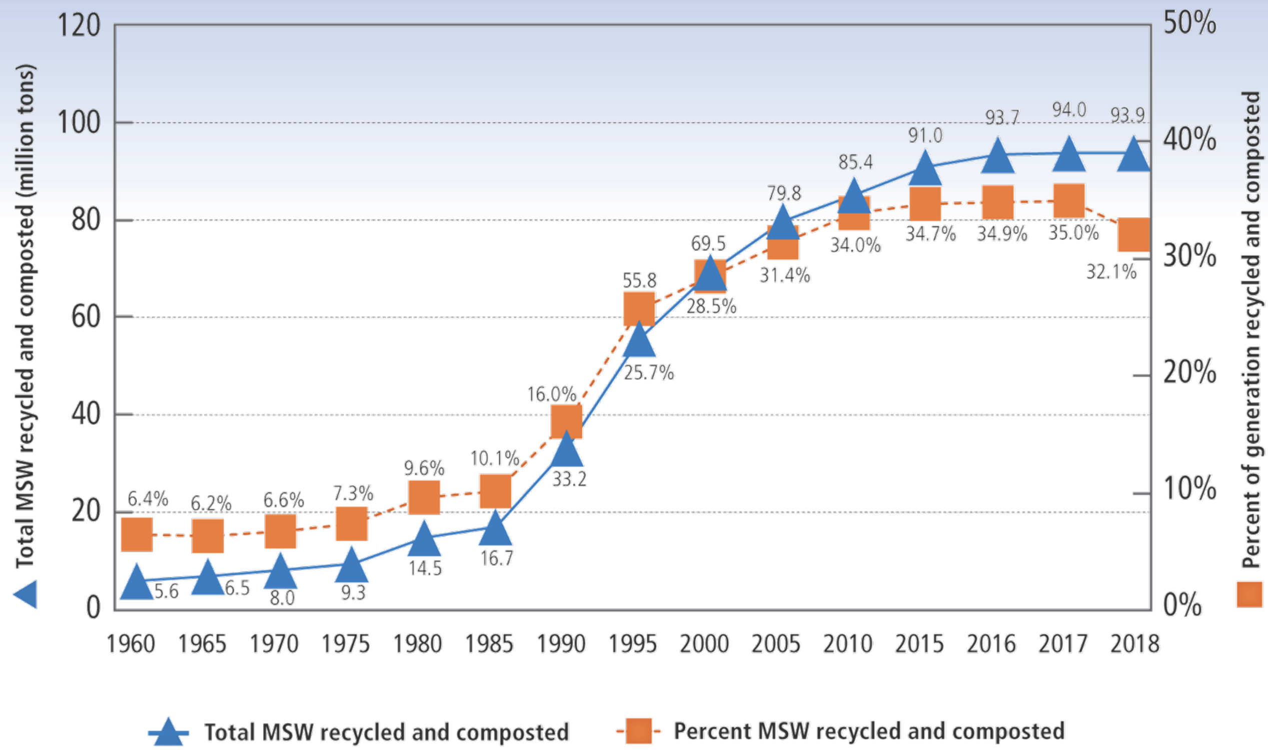


Figure 3. Management of MSW in the United States, 2018

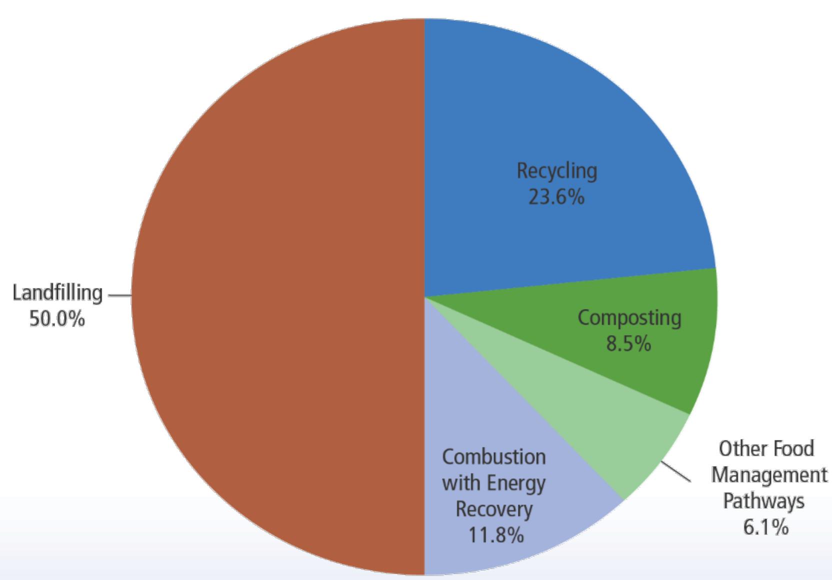


Table 1. Generation, Recycling, Composting, Other Food Management Pathways, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling of Materials in MSW, 2018*
(in millions of tons and percent of generation of each material)

Material	Weight Generated	Weight Recycled	Weight Composted	Weight Other Food Management Pathways¥	Weight Combusted with Energy Recovery	Weight Landfilled	Recycling as Percent of Generation	Composting as Percent of Generation	Other Food Management Pathways as Percent of Generation	Combustion as Percent of Generation	Landfilling as Percent of Generation
Paper and paperboard	67.39	45.97	-	-	4.20	17.22	68.2%	-	-	6.2%	25.6%
Glass	12.25	3.06	-	-	1.64	7.55	25.0%	-	-	13.4%	61.6%
Metals											
Steel	19.20	6.36	-	-	2.31	10.53	33.1%	-	-	12.0%	54.9%
Aluminum	3.89	0.67	-	-	0.56	2.66	17.2%	-	-	14.4%	68.4%
Other nonferrous metals†	2.51	1.69	-	-	0.08	0.74	67.3%	-	-	3.2%	29.5%
Total metals	**25.60**	**8.72**	-	-	**2.95**	**13.93**	**34.1%**	-	-	**11.5%**	**54.4%**
Plastics	35.68	3.09	-	-	5.62	26.97	8.7%	-	-	15.8%	75.5%
Rubber and leather	9.16	1.67	-	-	2.50	4.99	18.2%	-	-	27.3%	54.5%
Textiles	17.03	2.51	-	-	3.22	11.30	14.7%	-	-	18.9%	66.4%
Wood	18.09	3.10	-	-	2.84	12.15	17.1%	-	-	15.7%	67.2%
Other materials	4.56	0.97	-	-	0.66	2.93	21.3%	-	-	14.4%	64.3%
Total materials in products	**189.76**	**69.09**	-	-	**23.63**	**97.04**	**36.4%**	-	-	**12.5%**	**51.1%**
Other wastes											
Food, other‡	63.13	-	2.59	17.71	7.55	35.28	-	4.1%	28.1%	11.9%	55.9%
Yard trimmings	35.40	-	22.30	-	2.57	10.53	-	63.0%	-	7.3%	29.7%
Miscellaneous inorganic wastes	4.07	-	-	-	0.80	3.27	-	-	-	19.7%	80.3%
Total other wastes	**102.60**	-	**24.89**	**17.71**	**10.92**	**49.08**	-	**24.3%**	**17.3%**	**10.6%**	**47.8%**
Total municipal solid waste	**292.36**	**69.09**	**24.89**	**17.71**	**34.55**	**146.12**	**23.6%**	**8.5%**	**6.1%**	**11.8%**	**50.0%**

* Includes waste from residential, commercial and institutional sources.

¥ Animal feed, bio-based materials/biochemical processing, codigestion/anaerobic digestion, donation, land application, sewer/wastewater treatment.

† Includes lead from lead-acid batteries.

‡ Includes collection of other MSW organics for composting.

Details might not add to totals due to rounding.

Negligible = Less than 5,000 tons or 0.05 percent.
A dash in the table means that data are not available.

Trends in Municipal Solid Waste

Our MSW, or trash, is comprised of various items consumers throw away. These items include packaging, food, yard trimmings, furniture, electronics, tires and appliances. MSW does not include industrial, hazardous or C&D waste. Sources of MSW include residential waste, as well as waste from commercial and institutional locations, such as restaurants, grocery stores, other businesses, schools, hospitals and industrial facilities. Industrial facility waste includes waste from sources such as offices, cafeterias and packaging, but not process waste.

Over the last few decades, the generation, recycling, composting, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling of MSW has changed substantially. Solid waste generation peaked at 4.74 pounds per person per day in 2000 and 2005, falling to 4.51 pounds per person per day in 2017. The higher rate of 4.91 pounds per person per day in 2018 reflects the change in food waste measurement methodology (*See* Figure 1 and text box).

The combined recycling and composting rate increased from less than 10 percent of generated MSW in 1980 to 35.0 percent in 2017. In 2018, the recycling and composting rate was 32.1 percent (*See* Figure 2). Without including composting, recycling alone rose from 14.5 million tons (9.6 percent of MSW) in 1980 to 69 million tons (23.6 percent) in 2018. Although more tons were recycled in 2018 than ever before, the recycling rate decreased to the lowest levels since 2006. Composting was negligible in 1980, but it rose to 24.9 million tons in 2018 (8.5 percent).

In 2018, for the first time in this report series, EPA revised its food measurement methodology to more fully capture flows of excess food and food waste throughout the food system. The resulting category, other food management pathways, accounted for 17.7 million tons (6.1 percent) (*See* Figure 3, Table 2 and text box for details).

Combustion with energy recovery was less than 2 percent of generation in 1980 at 2.8 million tons. In 2018, 34.6 million tons (11.8 percent of MSW generated) were combusted with energy recovery (*See* Table 2).

Since 1990, the total amount of MSW going to landfills has increased by less than one million tons, from 145.3 million tons in 1990 to 146.1 million tons in 2018 (*See* Table 2). The net per capita 2018 landfilling rate was 2.4 pounds per day, which was lower than the 3.2 per capita rate in 1990 (*See* Table 3).

New Enhanced Food Measurement Methodology

EPA enhanced its food measurement methodology to more fully estimate flows of food throughout the food system. Expanding beyond composting, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling, 2018 estimates include food flowing to a total of nine pathways. The food waste generation estimates for 2018 account for the additional food flowing to the six new pathways which are:

- animal feed
- land application
- codigestion/anaerobic digestion
- bio-based materials/biochemical processing
- donation
- sewer/wastewater treatment

Table 2. Generation, Recycling, Composting, Other Food Management Pathways, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling of MSW, 1960 to 2018 (in millions of tons)

Activity	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2018
Generation	88.1	121.1	151.6	208.3	243.5	253.7	251.1	262.1	268.7	292.4
Recycling	5.6	8.0	14.5	29.0	53.0	59.2	65.3	67.6	67.0	69.1
Composting*	neg.	neg.	neg.	4.2	16.5	20.6	20.2	23.4	27.0	24.9
Other Food Management**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17.7
Combustion with energy recovery†	0.0	0.5	2.8	29.8	33.7	31.7	29.3	33.5	34.2	34.6
Landfilling and other disposal‡	82.5	112.6	134.3	145.3	140.3	142.2	136.3	137.6	140.5	146.1

* Composting of yard trimmings, food and other MSW organic material. Does not include backyard composting.

** Other food management pathways include animal feed, bio-based materials/biochemical processing, codigestion/anaerobic digestion, donation, land application and sewer/wastewater treatment.

Details might not add to totals due to rounding.
neg. (negligible) = less than 5,000 tons or 0.05 percent.
A dash in the table means that data are not available.

† Includes combustion of MSW in mass burn or refuse-derived fuel form, and combustion with energy recovery of source separated materials in MSW (e.g., wood pallets, tire-derived fuel).

‡ Landfilling is what remains after recycling, composting, other food management and combustion with energy recovery are accounted for. Landfilling includes other disposal methods such as combustion without energy recovery.

Table 3. Generation, Recycling, Composting, Other Food Management Pathways, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling of MSW, 1960 to 2018 (in pounds per person per day)

Activity	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2018
Generation	2.7	3.3	3.7	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.9
Recycling	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.6	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2
Composting*	neg.	neg.	neg.	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4
Other Food Management**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.3
Combustion with energy recovery†	0.0	neg.	0.1	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6
Landfilling and other disposal‡	2.5	3.1	3.2	3.2	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.4
Population (In millions)	180.0	204.0	227.3	249.9	281.4	296.4	309.1	320.9	325.1	327.2

* Composting of yard trimmings, food and other MSW organic material. Does not include backyard composting.

** Other food management pathways include animal feed, bio-based materials/biochemical processing, codigestion/anaerobic digestion, donation, land application and sewer/wastewater treatment.

Details might not add to totals due to rounding.
neg. (negligible) = less than 5,000 tons or 0.05 percent.
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† Includes combustion of MSW in mass burn or refuse-derived fuel form, and combustion with energy recovery of source separated materials in MSW (e.g., wood pallets, tire-derived fuel).

‡ Landfilling is what remains after recycling, composting, other food management and combustion with energy recovery are accounted for. Landfilling includes other disposal methods such as combustion without energy recovery.

Analyzing MSW

EPA analyzes MSW by breaking down the data in two ways: by material and by product. Materials are made into products, which are ultimately reprocessed through recycling or composting or managed by combustion with energy recovery facilities or landfills. They may also be processed by other management methods for food. Examples of materials that EPA tracks include paper and paperboard, plastics, metals, glass, rubber, leather, textiles, wood, food and yard trimmings. For a full list of materials, *see* Table 1.

Products are what people buy and handle, and they are manufactured out of the types of materials listed above. Product categories include containers and packaging, nondurable goods, durable goods, food and yard trimmings. Containers and packaging, such as milk cartons and plastic wrap, are assumed to be in use for a year or less; nondurable goods like newspaper and clothing are assumed to be in use for less than three years; and durable goods, such as furniture, are assumed to be in use for three or more years. Some products, such as appliances, may be made of more than one material. Information about products shows how consumers are using and discarding materials and offers strategies on ways to maximize the source reduction, recycling and composting of materials.

Materials in MSW

Table 1 and the following figures provide specific information about materials in MSW. Table 1 shows generation, recycling, composting, other food management pathways, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling by material, weight and percent of generation.

Figure 4, below, provides the breakdown of MSW generation by material. Paper and paperboard, along with food, continued to be the largest components of MSW generated. Paper and paperboard accounted for about 23 percent, while food accounted for over 21 percent. Yard trimmings and plastics comprised about 12 percent each. The remaining amount of MSW generated consisted of rubber, leather and textiles; metals; wood; glass; and other materials.

Figure 5 provides the breakdown of MSW recycling by material in 2018. Paper and paperboard comprised the largest component of MSW recycling, representing nearly 67 percent. Metals made up over 12 percent of MSW recycled. The remaining amount of MSW recycled consisted of rubber, leather and textiles; plastics; glass; wood; and other materials.

Figure 6 provides the breakdown of MSW composting and other food management pathways by material, Figure 7 provides the breakdown of MSW combustion with energy recovery and Figure 8 provides the breakdown of MSW landfilling.

Figure 4. Total MSW Generation (by material), 2018
292.4 Million Tons

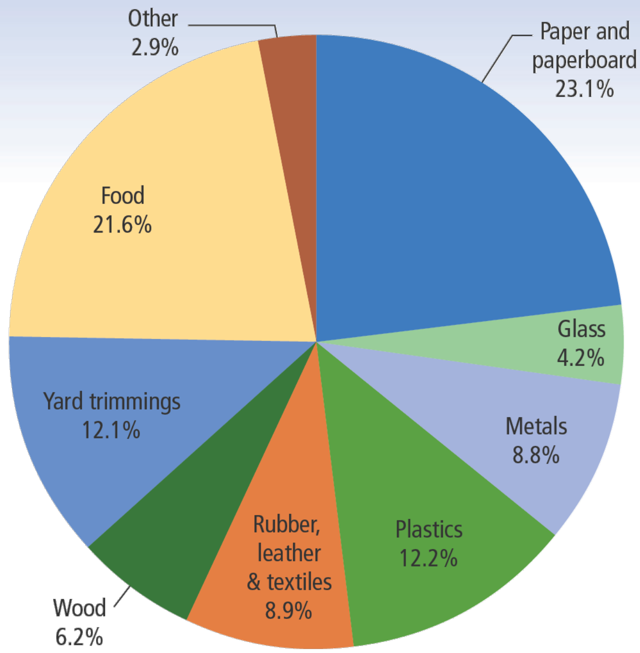


Figure 5. Total MSW Recycling (by material), 2018
69.1 Million Tons

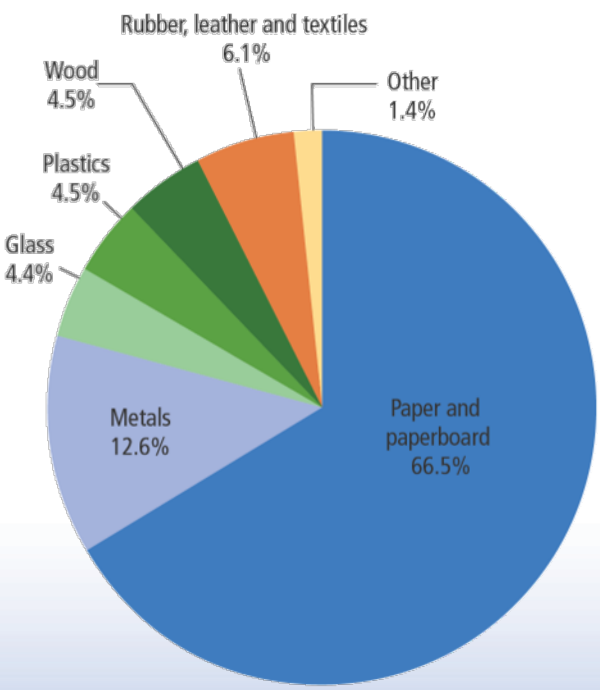


Figure 6. Total MSW Composting and Other Food Management Pathways (by material), 2018
42.6 Million Tons

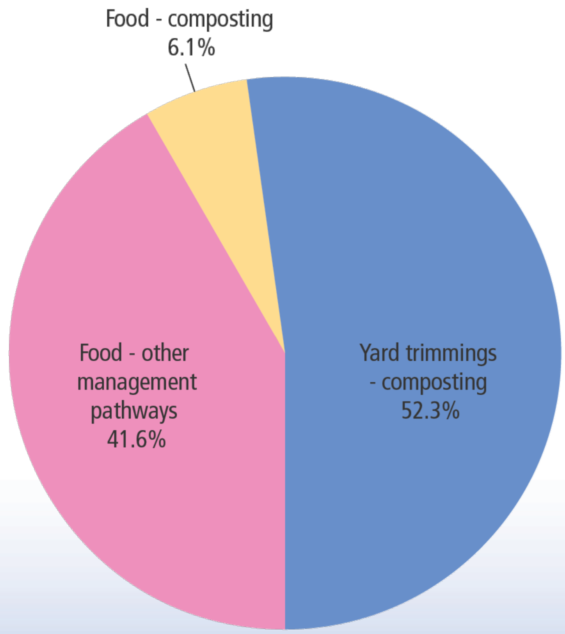


Figure 7. Total MSW Combusted with Energy Recovery (by material), 2018 34.6 Million Tons

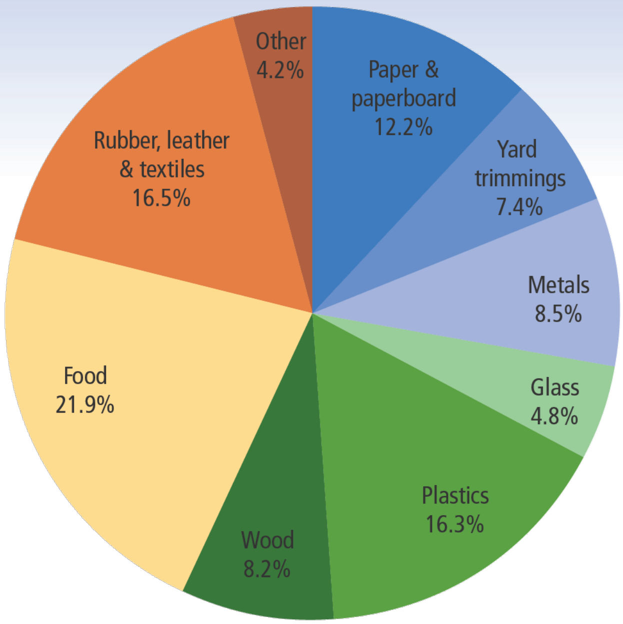
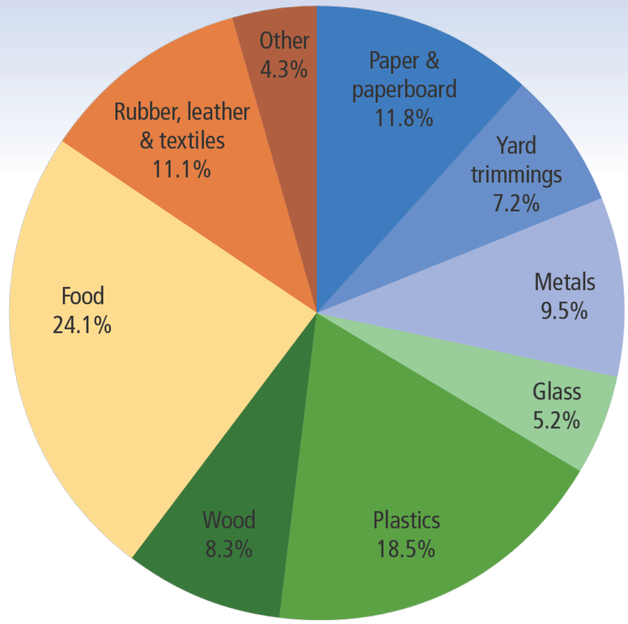


Figure 8. Total MSW Landfilled (by material), 2018 146.1 Million Tons



Products in MSW

The following information provides the details of the products found in MSW, including generation, recycling, composting, other food management pathways, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling by product category, weight and percent of generation. The product categories include containers and packaging, durable goods, nondurable goods, and other wastes which include food, yard trimmings and miscellaneous inorganic wastes. See Table 4 for generation and management by product category.

These other wastes made up the largest portion of MSW generated at 102.6 million tons (35.1 percent) in 2018. More than 82 million tons of containers and packaging (28.1 percent), 57.1 million tons (19.5 percent of MSW generation) of durable goods and more than 50 million tons (17.3 percent of MSW generation) of nondurable goods were generated.

The containers and packaging product category had the highest recycling rate at 53.9 percent in 2018. Paper products, steel and aluminum were the most recycled materials by percentage in this category. The recycling of nondurable goods was 28.1 percent. Paper products such as newspapers/mechanical papers were the most recycled nondurable goods. Newspapers/mechanical papers include newspapers, directories, inserts, as well as some advertisement and direct mail printing. Overall, 18.5 percent of durable goods were recycled. With a 99 percent recycling rate in 2018, lead-acid batteries continued to be one of the most recycled products.

Yard trimmings had the highest composting rate of all product categories at 63 percent. Food was composted at a rate of 4.1 percent. Other food management pathways were estimated at 28.1 percent of food waste generation.

Durable goods were combusted at a rate of 16 percent and nondurables at a rate of 14.1 percent. Food and miscellaneous inorganic wastes were combusted with energy recovery with a rate of 11.9 percent and 19.7 percent, respectively. Containers and packaging, along with yard trimmings, were combusted at rates below 10 percent.

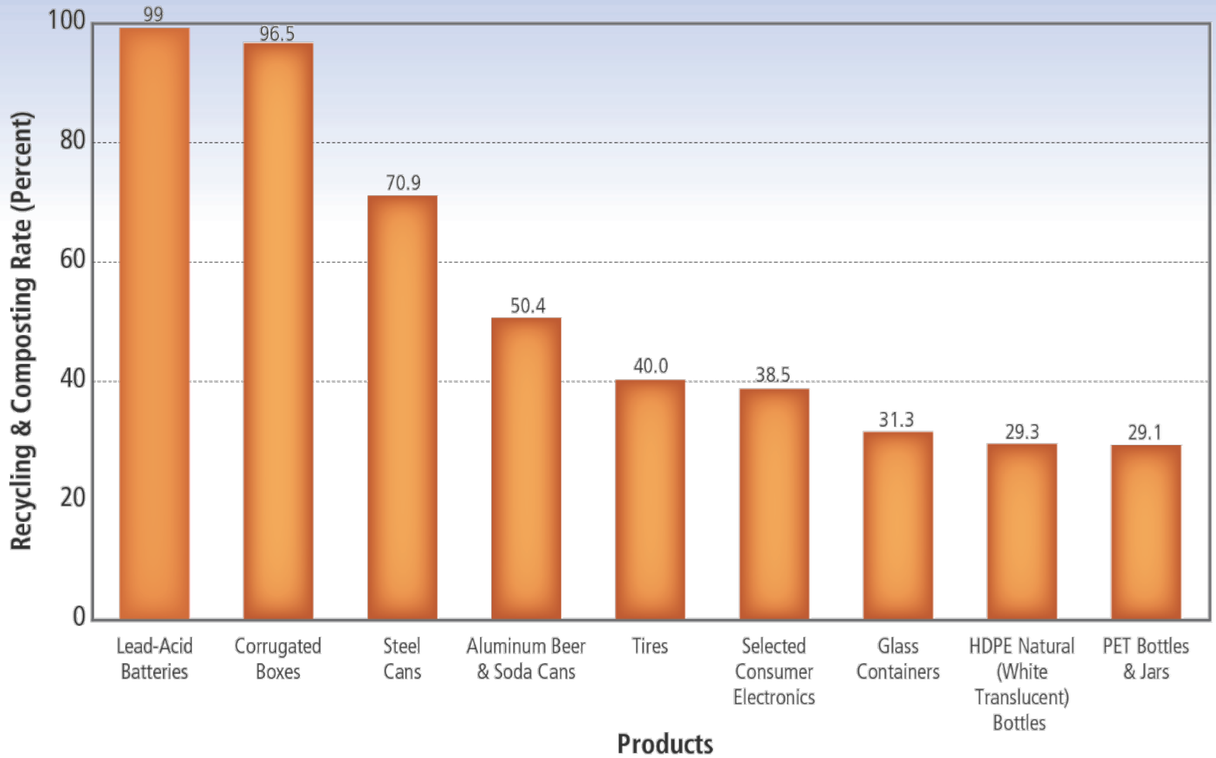
Durable goods had the highest landfill rate of 65.5 percent. Nondurable goods had the second highest landfill rate at 57.8 percent. Food had the third highest landfill rate of 55.9 percent. Containers and packaging, along with yard trimmings, were the product categories with the lowest landfill rates at 37.1 percent and 29.7 percent, respectively.

Figure 9 displays selected individual products with high recycling rates.

Recycling Rates

Measured by percent of generation, individual products with the highest recycling rates in 2018 were lead-acid batteries (99 percent), corrugated boxes (96.5 percent), steel cans (70.9 percent), newspapers/mechanical papers (64.8 percent), major appliances (59.8 percent), aluminum cans (50.4 percent), mixed paper (43.1 percent), tires (40 percent) and selected consumer electronics (38.5 percent).

Figure 9. Selected Products with High Recycling Rates, 2018*



*Does not include combustion with energy recovery

Table 4. Generation, Recycling, Composting, Other Food Management Pathways, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling of Products in MSW, 2018*
(in millions of tons and percent of generation of each product)

Products	Weight Generated	Weight Recycled	Weight Composted	Weight Other Food Management Pathways¥	Weight Combusted with Energy Recovery	Weight Landfilled	Recycling as Percent of Generation	Composting as Percent of Generation	Other Food Management Pathways as Percent of Generation	Combustion as Percent of Generation	Landfilling as Percent of Generation
Durable goods											
Steel	16.99	4.73	-	-	2.20	10.06	27.8%	-	-	13.0%	59.2%
Aluminum	1.75	-	-	-	0.27	1.48	-	-	-	15.4%	84.6%
Other nonferrous metals†	2.51	1.69	-	-	0.08	0.74	67.3%	-	-	3.2%	29.5%
Glass	2.46	Negligible	-	-	0.33	2.13	Negligible	-	-	13.4%	86.6%
Plastics	13.69	0.93	-	-	1.74	11.02	6.8%	-	-	12.7%	80.5%
Rubber and leather	7.98	1.67	-	-	2.27	4.04	20.9%	-	-	28.5%	50.6%
Wood	6.51	Negligible	-	-	1.18	5.33	Negligible	-	-	18.1%	81.9%
Textiles	3.87	0.58	-	-	1.02	2.27	15.0%	-	-	26.3%	58.7%
Other materials	1.34	0.97	-	-	0.03	0.34	72.4%	-	-	2.2%	25.4%
Total durable goods	**57.10**	**10.57**	**-**	**-**	**9.12**	**37.41**	**18.5%**	**-**	**-**	**16.0%**	**65.5%**
Nondurable goods											
Paper and paperboard	25.49	12.08	-	-	2.63	10.78	47.4%	-	-	10.3%	42.3%
Plastics	7.46	0.18	-	-	1.42	5.86	2.4%	-	-	19.0%	78.6%
Rubber and leather	1.18	Negligible	-	-	0.23	0.95	Negligible	-	-	19.5%	80.5%
Textiles	12.87	1.93	-	-	2.14	8.80	15.0%	-	-	16.6%	68.4%
Other materials	3.44	Negligible	-	-	0.67	2.77	Negligible	-	-	19.5%	80.5%
Total nondurable goods	**50.44**	**14.19**	**-**	**-**	**7.09**	**29.16**	**28.1%**	-	-	**14.1%**	**57.8%**

Table 4 (continued). Generation, Recycling, Composting, Other Food Management Pathways, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling of Products in MSW, 2018*
(in millions of tons and percent of generation of each product)

Products	Weight Generated	Weight Recycled	Weight Composted	Weight Other Food Management Pathways¥	Weight Combusted with Energy Recovery	Weight Landfilled	Recycling as Percent of Generation	Composting as Percent of Generation	Other Food Management Pathways as Percent of Generation	Combustion as Percent of Generation	Landfilling as Percent of Generation
Containers and packaging											
Steel	2.21	1.63	-	-	0.11	0.47	73.8%	-	-	5.0%	21.2%
Aluminum	1.92	0.67	-	-	0.25	1.00	34.9%	-	-	13.0%	52.1%
Glass	9.79	3.06	-	-	1.31	5.42	31.3%	-	-	13.3%	55.4%
Paper and paperboard	41.90	33.89	-	-	1.57	6.44	80.9%	-	-	3.7%	15.4%
Plastics	14.53	1.98	-	-	2.46	10.09	13.6%	-	-	16.9%	69.5%
Wood	11.58	3.10	-	-	1.66	6.82	26.9%	-	-	14.3%	58.8%
Other materials	0.29	Negligible	-	-	0.06	0.23	Negligible	-	-	20.7%	79.3%
Total containers and packaging	**82.22**	**44.33**	**-**	**-**	**7.42**	**30.47**	**53.9%**	**-**	**-**	**9.0%**	**37.1%**
Other wastes											
Food, other‡	63.13	-	2.59	17.71	7.55	35.28	-	4.1%	28.1%	11.9%	55.9%
Yard trimmings	35.40	-	22.30	-	2.57	10.53	-	63.0%	-	7.3%	29.7%
Miscellaneous inorganic wastes	4.07	-	-	-	0.80	3.27	-	-	-	19.7%	80.3%
Total other wastes	**102.60**	**-**	**24.89**	**17.71**	**10.92**	**49.08**	**-**	**24.3%**	**17.3%**	**10.6%**	**47.8%**
Total municipal solid waste	**292.36**	**69.09**	**24.89**	**17.71**	**34.55**	**146.12**	**23.6%**	**8.5%**	**6.1%**	**11.8%**	**50.0%**

* Includes waste from residential, commercial and institutional sources.

¥ Animal feed, bio-based materials/biochemical processing, codigestion/anaerobic digestion, donation, land application, sewer/wastewater treatment.

† Includes lead from lead-acid batteries.

‡ Includes collection of other MSW organics for composting.

Details might not add to totals due to rounding.

Negligible = less than 5,000 tons or 0.05 percent.
A dash in the table means that data are not available.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

Environmental Benefits of Recycling and Composting

The energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) benefits of recycling, composting and combustion with energy recovery that are shown in Table 5 are calculated using EPA's WARM (Waste Reduction Model) tool (*See*: https://www.epa.gov/warm). WARM calculates and totals the GHG emissions of baseline and alternative waste management practices, including source reduction, recycling, composting, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling. For example, paper and paperboard recycling, at about 46 million tons, resulted in a reduction of over 155 $MMTCO_2E$ in 2018. This reduction is equivalent to removing over 33 million cars from the road for one year.

In 2018, about 94 million tons of MSW in the U.S. were recycled and composted, saving over 193 $MMTCO_2E$. This is comparable to the emissions that could be reduced from taking almost 42 million cars off the road in a year.

Table 5. 2018 Environmental Benefits

(The numbers in the Recycled, Composted, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilled columns are listed by weight of material* in millions of tons)

Material	Recycled	Composted	Combustion with Energy Recovery	Landfilled	GHG Benefits ($MMTCO_2E$)	Number of Cars Taken Off the Road Per Year (millions of cars)
Paper and paperboard	45.97	-	4.20	17.22	(155.17)	(33.52)
Glass	3.06	-	1.64	7.55	(0.90)	(0.19)
Metals						
Steel	6.36	-	2.31	10.53	(15.50)	(3.35)
Aluminum	0.67	-	0.56	2.66	(6.12)	(1.32)
Other nonferrous metals**	1.69	-	0.08	0.74	(7.54)	(1.63)
Total metals	**8.72**	**-**	**2.95**	**13.93**	**(29.16)**	**(6.30)**
Plastics	3.09	-	5.62	26.97	4.13	0.89
Rubber and leather†	1.67	-	1.73	0.78	0.17	0.04
Textiles	2.51	-	3.22	11.30	(2.56)	(0.55)
Wood	3.10	-	2.84	12.15	(3.30)	(0.71)
Food, other‡	-	2.59	7.55	35.28	(6.97)	(1.51)
Yard trimmings	-	22.30	2.57	10.53	0.78	0.17
Miscellaneous inorganic wastes	-	-	0.80	3.27	(0.28)	(0.06)
Totals	68.12	24.89	33.12	138.98	(193.26)	(41.74)

*Includes material from residential, commercial, institutional and industrial sources (except not industrial process waste).

**Includes lead-acid batteries. Other nonferrous metals calculated in WARM as mixed metals.

†Only includes rubber from tires.

‡Includes collection of other MSW organics for composting.

These calculations do not include an additional 24.9 million tons of MSW that could not be addressed in the WARM model (including 17.7 million tons from food waste managed by means outside of the scope of the WARM model). $MMTCO_2E$ is million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. Numbers in parentheses indicate a reduction in either greenhouse gases or vehicles, and therefore represent environmental benefits. Details might not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: WARM model Version 15 (https://www.epa.gov/warm). Number of cars taken off the road/year was calculated using the Greenhouse Gas Equivalency Calculator, updated March 2020.

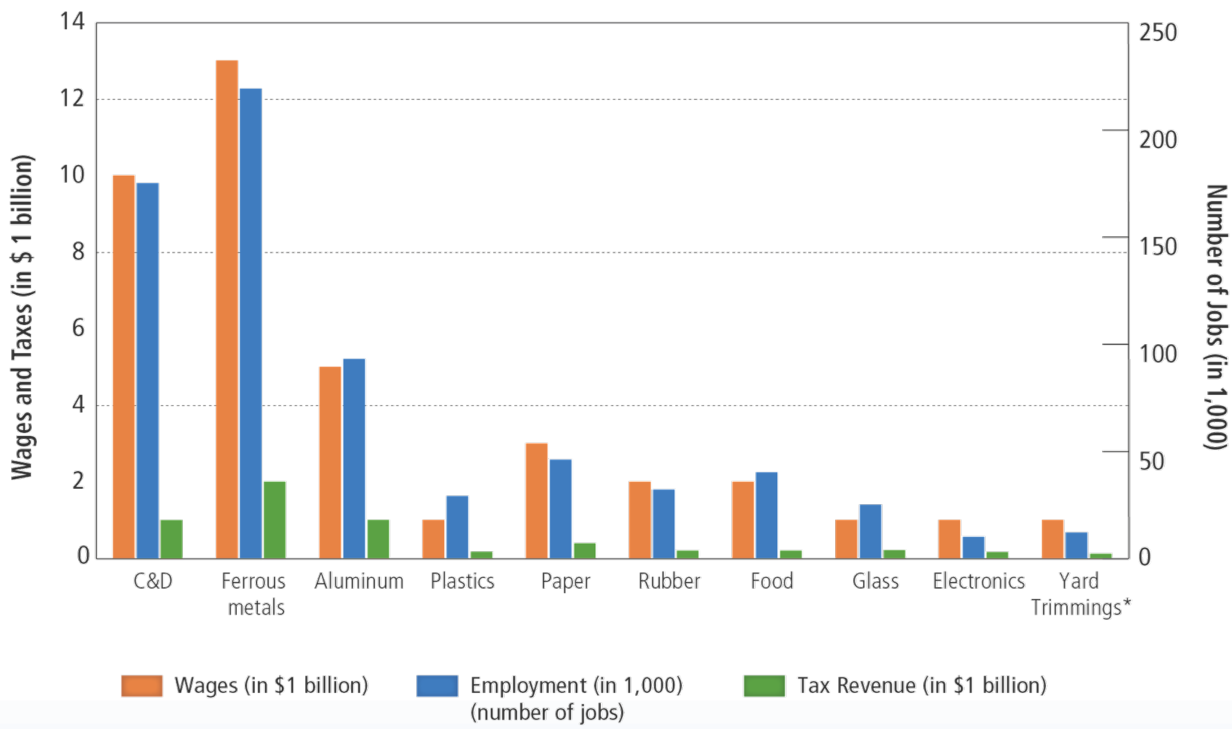
Economic Indicators

Economic Benefits of Recycling and Composting

How our nation uses materials is fundamental to our economic and environmental future. Economic and community benefits of recycling include increasing economic security by tapping a domestic source of materials; supporting American manufacturing; conserving valuable resources; and creating jobs in the recycling and manufacturing industries.

In 2020, EPA updated the Recycling Economic Information (REI) Report[1] to increase the understanding of the economic implications of material reuse and recycling. The 2020 REI Report included updated information about the number of recycling jobs, wages and tax revenue (*See* Figure 10). The report showed that the recycling and reuse of materials creates jobs and also generates local and state tax revenues. The data from the most recent year available showed that in 2012, recycling and reuse activities in the United States accounted for: 681,000 jobs; $37.8 billion in wages; and $5.5 billion in tax revenues. This calculation equates to 1.17 jobs for every 1,000 tons of materials recycled. Ferrous metal provided the largest contribution to all three categories (jobs, wages and tax revenue), followed by C&D and nonferrous metals, such as aluminum.

Figure 10. Wages, Taxes and Jobs Attributed to Recycling



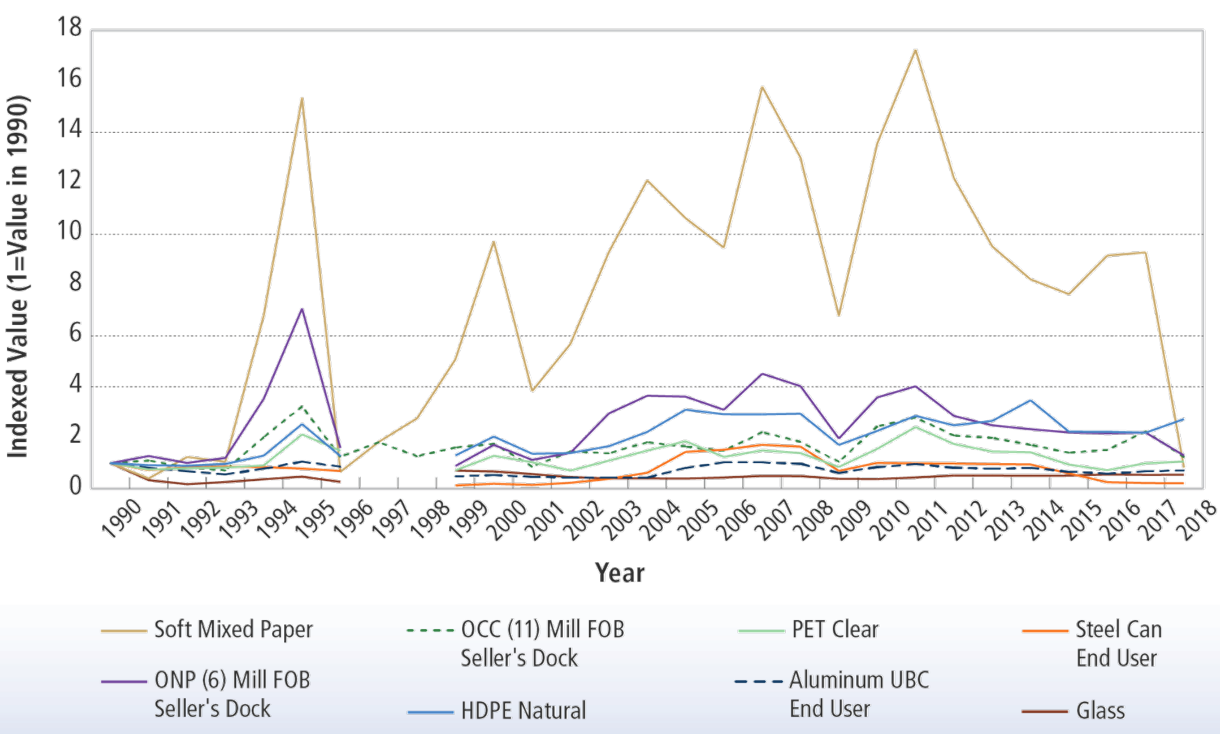
* Yard Trimmings category includes biodiesel, biogas, compost, mulch and wood chips

Recycled Commodity Values

Scrap[2] commodity markets set the price for materials that are being recycled, such as various types of paper or plastic. Manufacturers can realize cost, energy and environmental savings when scrap commodities are used as raw materials instead of virgin materials[3].The prices for these markets are determined by the perceived value of the commodity and the relative supply and demand at any given point in time. This could provide insight on how municipalities or other organizations responsible for recycling may change their behavior to promote recycling practices and the resulting prices could be a driver toward the overall incentive to recycle across the country. This analysis focuses on the market set prices of a variety of postconsumer plastics, steel and aluminum cans, paper and glass, which represent a subset of all recycled commodity markets.

Figure 11 shows trends in commodity prices over time. It provides the indexed values by year for the following recycled commodities from 1990 to 2018: high-density polyethylene (HDPE) natural bottles; polyethylene terephthalate (PET) clear bottles; aluminum used beverage cans (UBC); steel cans; old newspaper (ONP) (grade 6 and 56); old corrugated containers (OCC) (grade 11); paper stock (PS) (grade 1 and 54) soft mixed paper; and glass containers. The values are normalized to 2018 using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).They are indexed to allow commodity values with different metrics, such as dollars per ton, dollars per gross ton and dollars per short ton, to be shown on the same graph and to compare their relative rates of change. The indexed value indicates the change in value of the data since 1990, where one is equal to the value in 1990. For example, an indexed value of two would mean the commodity value for that year would be two times the 1990 value.

Figure 11. Indexed Recycled Commodity Values by Year



Source: Pulp & Paper Global Fact & Price Book, 2003-2004. Page 128. Paperloop, Inc. 2004. See endnotes for additional sources[4]

Figure 11 shows similar trends across all commodities for indexed values, where one is equal to the value in 1990. For example, all commodity values spiked in 1995, except steel cans, and dipped in 2009. Many commodities also experienced a price spike in 2000, 2007 and 2011. In contrast, the indexed lines for glass, aluminum and steel cans appear to fluctuate less frequently. Figure 11 also shows all paper grades (ONP, OCC and mixed paper) experienced a drop in 2018.

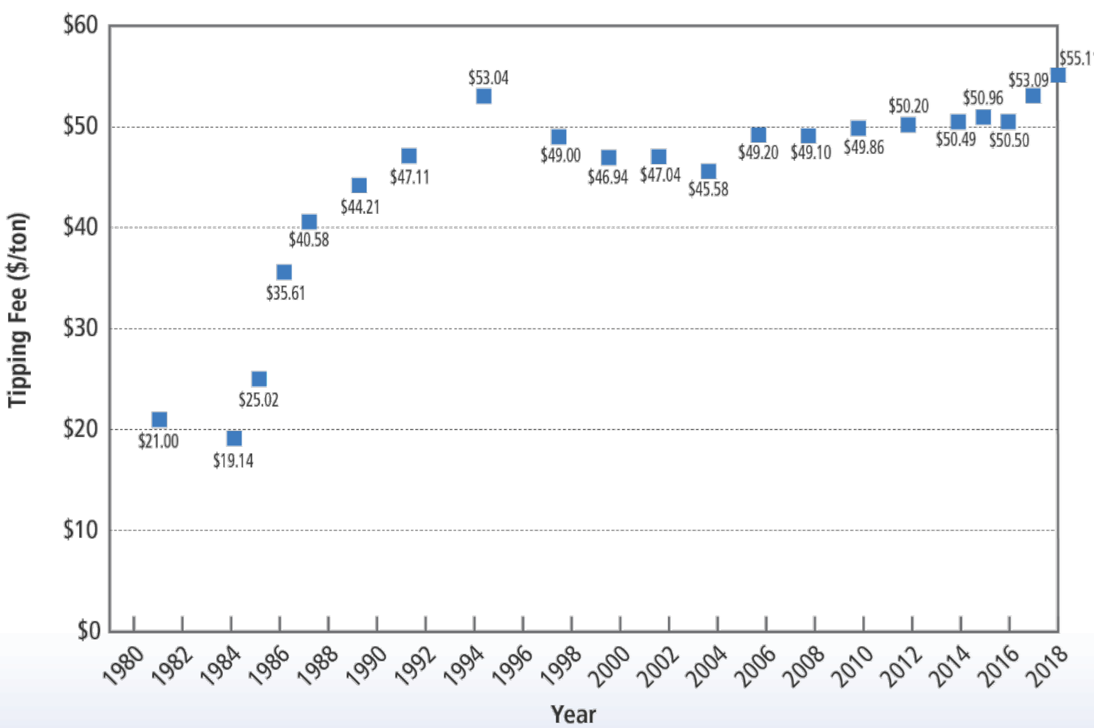
Landfill Tipping Fees

Tipping fees are important to consider as they typically increase as landfill capacity decreases. For example, the average tipping fee in South Central states ($34.80) with more available space for landfills (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas) is about half of the average in the Northeast ($67.39).[5]

From 1985 to 1995, there was a rapid rise in national landfill tipping fees, followed by a steady decrease from 1995 to 2004. Since 2004, there has been a slow and steady average increase of about one percent per year in landfill tipping fees (*See* Figure 12). The tipping fees are expressed in constant 2018 dollars.

To allow for meaningful comparisons, national mean annual landfill tipping fees were normalized to the value of the dollar in 2018 using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This figure shows an average increase from 1985 to 1995 of $3.39 per year, followed by a steady decrease of $0.83 per year through 2004 and an average increase of $0.68 per year from 2004 to 2018.

Figure 12. National Landfill Tipping Fees, 1982-2018 ($2018 per ton)



Source: National Solid Wastes Management Association (NSWMA) Municipal Solid Waste Landfill Facts. See endnotes for additional sources[6]

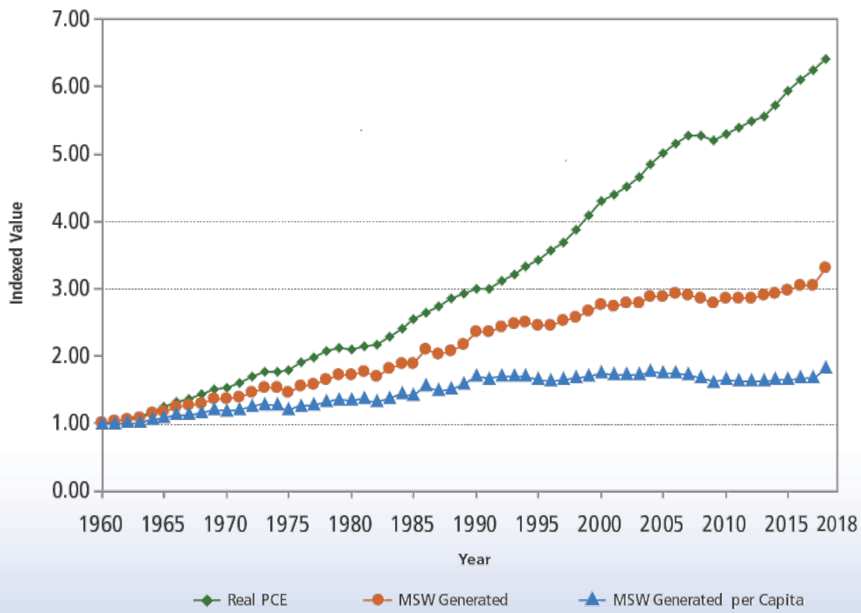
MSW Generation and Household Spending

In the United States, the change in the amount of MSW generated typically mirrors trends in how much money households spent on goods and services. Personal Consumer Expenditures (PCE) measure household spending on goods and services such as food, clothing, vehicles and recreation services. PCE is one of the four components of economic growth, along with government spending, private investments and net exports. As PCE is an indicator of the household consumption of goods and services, which make up nearly 70 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), PCE has a stronger conceptual tie to MSW generation than the other three GDP components. PCE adjusted for inflation is referred to as real PCE. This metric is more useful in making comparisons over time because it normalizes the value of a dollar by considering how much a dollar could purchase in the past versus today. Figure 13 explores the relationship between MSW generated and real PCE.

Figure 13 is an indexed graph, showing the relative changes in real PCE, MSW generated and MSW generated per capita over time. It is indexed to allow all three of these metrics to be shown on the same graph and to compare their relative rates of change since 1960. The indexed value indicates the change in the value of the data since 1960. For example, if, for a given year, the value was three, then the data value for that year would be three times the 1960 value. In this case, a 1960 value of 200 would mean the resulting year's value would be 600. The 2018 MSW per capita generation indexed value is 1.8, which means that MSW per capita generation has increased by 80 percent since 1960.

Figure 13 shows that real PCE has increased at a faster rate than MSW generation, and the disparity has become even more distinct since the mid-1990s. This index indicates that the amount of MSW generated per dollar spent is falling. In other words, the U.S. economy has been able to enjoy dramatic increases in household spending on consumer goods and services without the societal impact of similarly increasing MSW generation rates. This figure also shows that the MSW generated per capita leveled off in the early-to-mid 1990s.

Figure 13. Indexed MSW Generated and Real PCE over Time (1960-2018)



Source: See endnotes[7]

MSW Methodology

The data summarized in this fact sheet characterizes the MSW stream as a whole by using a materials flow methodology that relies on a mass balance approach. EPA recognizes that there are several approaches to measuring material flows. To be consistent, EPA reports the quantities of materials in tons in the current fact sheet, but the Agency will continue to explore options for alternative measurement methodologies to describe materials management in the United States.

Using data gathered from industry associations, businesses and government sources, such as the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Census Bureau, EPA estimates the weight in tons of all MSW materials and products generated, recycled, composted, managed by other methods for food, combusted with energy recovery and landfilled. Other sources of data, such as waste characterizations and research reports performed by governments, industry or the press, supplement these data.

EPA has consistently used materials flow analysis to allow for the comparison of data over the last three decades. EPA recognizes that this methodology differs from other methodologies that also estimate the generation of MSW and other waste data. EPA will continue to work with stakeholders to identify methodologies and additional publicly available data to improve our national understanding of materials flow in the United States.

Construction and Demolition (C&D) Debris Generation and Management Results

Construction and demolition (C&D) debris is a type of waste that is not included in MSW. Materials included in C&D debris are steel, wood products, drywall and plaster, brick and clay tile, asphalt shingles, concrete and asphalt concrete (asphalt pavement). These materials are used in buildings, roads and bridges, and other structures. The generation estimate represents C&D debris amounts from construction, renovation and demolition activities for buildings, roads and bridges, and other structures. C&D debris end-of-life (EOL) management includes quantities of materials going to next use or directed to landfills. “Next use” designates an intended next-use market which, depending on the material, may include fuel, manufactured products, aggregate, compost and mulch or soil amendment. The manufactured products next use encompasses estimates of C&D debris processed (e.g., ground, crushed or extracted and melted) for incorporation in the manufacture of new materials and products. For example, C&D asphalt is processed for use in the production of asphalt mixtures.

In 2018, 600 million tons of C&D debris were generated. Figure 14 shows the 2018 generation composition for C&D debris. C&D concrete was the largest portion at 67.5 percent, followed by asphalt concrete at 17.8 percent. C&D wood products made up 6.8 percent, and the other products accounted for 7.9 percent combined. The 2018 generation estimates are presented in more detail in Table 6. As shown in Figure 15, demolition represented over 90 percent of total C&D debris generation. Construction, on the other hand, represented under 10 percent.

Figure 14. C&D Debris Generation Composition by Material (before processing), 2018
600 Million Tons

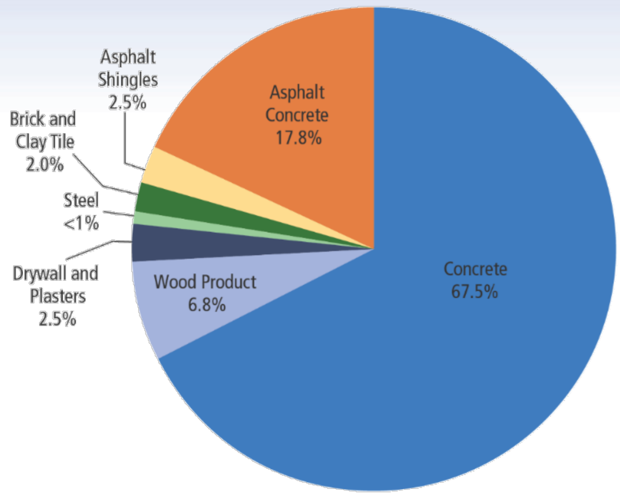


Table 6. C&D Debris Generation by Material and Activity, 2018 (in millions of tons)

	Waste During Construction	Demolition Debris	Total C&D Debris
Concrete	24.2	381.0	405.2
Wood Products[7]	3.4	37.4	40.8
Drywall and Plasters	3.9	11.3	15.2
Steel[8]	0	4.7	4.7
Brick and Clay Tile	0.3	12.0	12.3
Asphalt Shingles	1.2	13.9	15.1
Asphalt Concrete	0	107.0	107.0
Total	**33.0**	**567.3**	**600.3**

[8,9] See endnotes.

Figure 15. Contribution of Construction and Demolition Phases to Total 2018 C&D Debris Generation

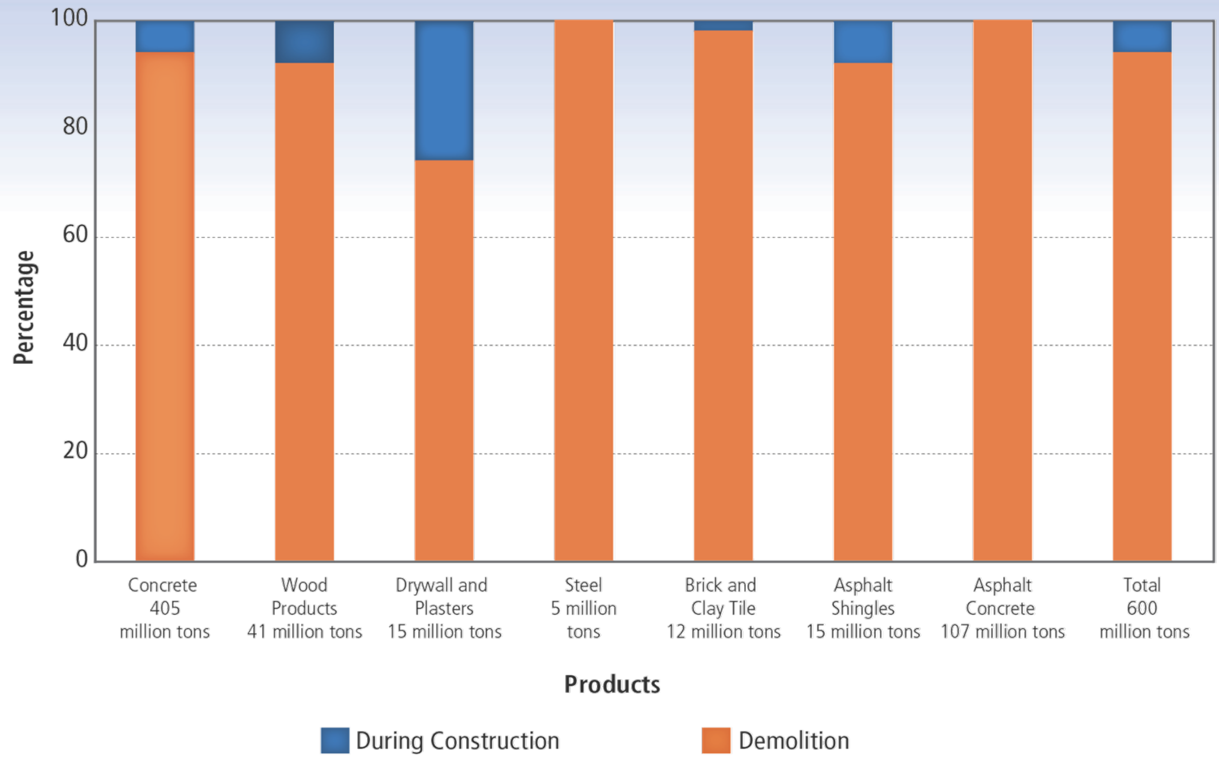


Table 7 displays the amount of C&D debris generation from buildings, roads and bridges, and other structures for each material. The "other structures" category includes C&D debris generation estimates from communication, power, transportation, sewer and waste disposal, water supply, conservation and development, and the manufacturing infrastructure. In 2018, roads and bridges contributed significantly more to C&D debris generation than buildings and other structures, and concrete made up the largest share of C&D debris generation for all three categories.

Table 7. C&D Debris Generation by Source, 2018 (in millions of tons)

	Buildings	Roads and Bridges	Other
Concrete	102.0	168.3	134.9
Wood Products[7]	39.5	0.0	1.3
Drywall and Plasters	15.2	0.0	0.0
Steel[8]	4.7	0.0	0.0
Brick and Clay Tile	12.3	0.0	0.0
Asphalt Shingles	15.1	0.0	0.0
Asphalt Concrete	0.0	107.0	0.0
Total	**188.8**	**275.3**	**136.2**

Figure 16 shows 2018 C&D debris managed through next use or sent to landfills. Aggregate was the main EOL next use for C&D debris at 52 percent. The total quantity of all C&D debris that was sent to aggregate was about 313 million tons. Concrete alone, was sent to aggregate at the quantity of about 301 million tons (see Table 8). The next largest end destination was landfill, at 24 percent of the total amount of C&D debris. The total quantity of all C&D debris that was sent to landfills was about 144 million tons. Over 71 million tons of concrete alone were sent to landfills (see Table 8).

Figure 16. C&D Debris Management by Destination, 2018
600 million tons

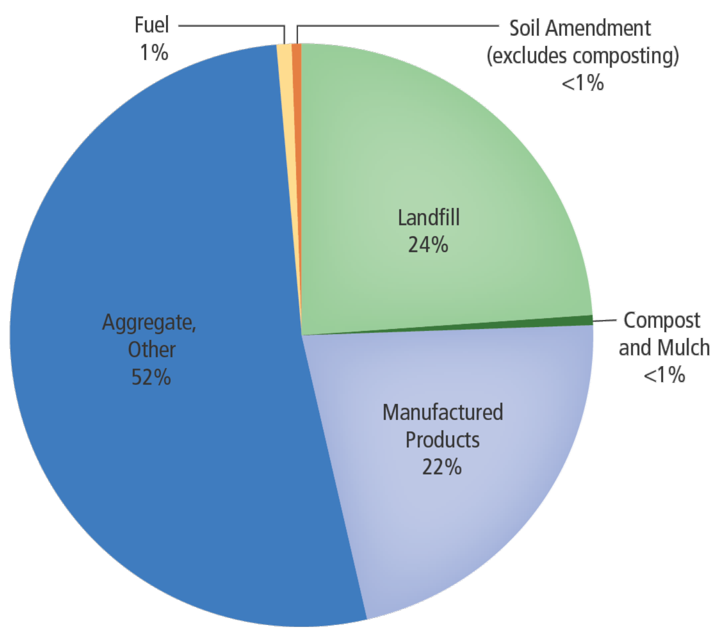


Figure 16 also shows that the “manufactured products” next use followed at 22 percent of the total generated C&D debris amount. The total quantity of all C&D debris that was sent to manufactured products was 132 million tons. About 92 million tons of C&D asphalt pavement alone, were incorporated in manufactured products (see Table 8). About 3 percent of the total C&D debris was directed to fuel, compost and mulch, and soil amendment (see Figure 16).

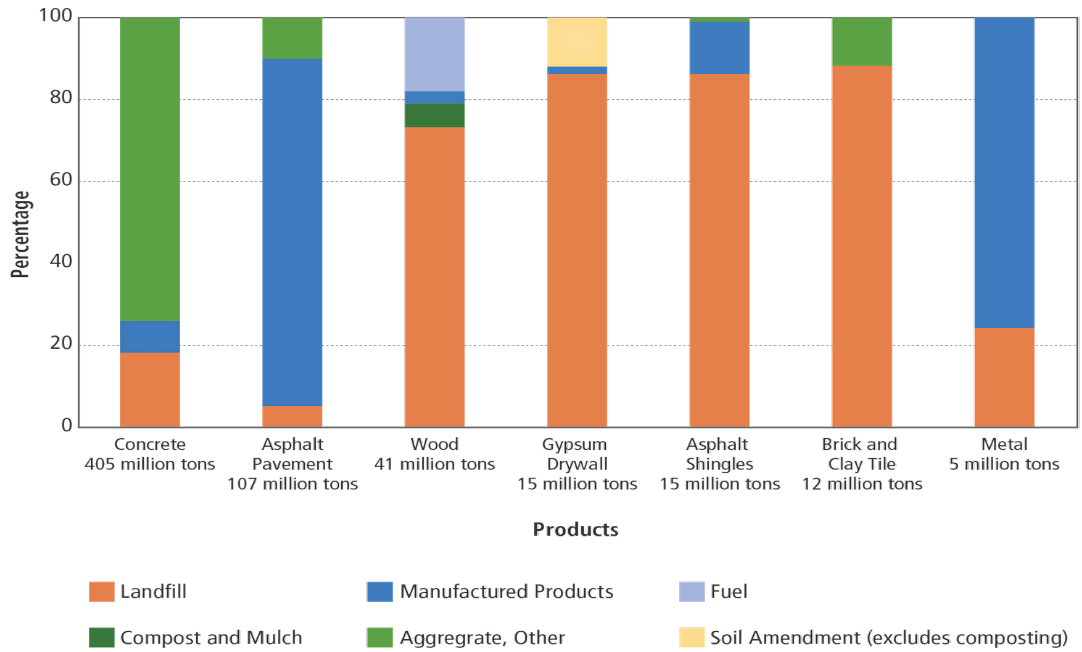
Table 8 is a summary of the total tonnages of each material type intended for next use destinations or sent to landfills. About 457 million tons were directed to next use and over 143 million tons of C&D debris were sent to landfills in 2018.

Figure 17 depicts quantities of a material in each destination as a fraction of the total generated amount for the material in 2018. The use in manufactured products was the dominant next use for asphalt concrete (asphalt pavement) and metals. Aggregate was the main destination for C&D concrete. Landfills were the primary destination for C&D debris wood, asphalt shingles, gypsum drywall[10] and brick and clay tile.

Table 8. C&D Debris Management by Material and Destination, 2018 (in millions of tons)

Material Type in C&D Debris	Landfill	Next Use					Total Next Use
		Compost and Mulch	Manufactured Products	Aggregate, Other	Fuel	Soil Amendment	
Concrete	71.2	0	32.8	301.2	0	0	334.0
Wood	29.6	2.5	1.2	0	7.5	0	11.2
Gypsum Drywall	13.2	0	.2	0	0	1.9	2.1
Metal	1.1	0	3.6	0	0	0	3.6
Brick and Clay Tile	10.8	0	0	1.5	0	0	1.5
Asphalt Shingles	13.0	0	2.0	.1	.02	0	2.1
Asphalt Concrete	4.9	0	91.8	10.3	0	0	102.1
TOTAL	**143.8**	**2.5**	**131.6**	**313.1**	**7.5**	**1.9**	**456.6**

Figure 17. C&D Debris Management by Destination, 2018 (percent of total generation amount for the material)



Resources

The 2018 data tables and the summary of the MSW characterization methodology are available on the EPA website, along with information about waste reduction, recycling and sustainable materials management. Please visit:

https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling

https://www.epa.gov/warm

Endnotes

1. US EPA. 2020. "Recycling Economic Information Report" (2020). The 2020 REI report provided updated economic and recycling information to reflect the most recent available data for input-output modeling in the United States. The 2020 report built on the Waste Input-Output methodology by generating more current results based on transparent and publicly available data. This revised study provides greater clarity and transparency for assessing the economic impacts of recycling activities in the U.S.
2. Scrap can refer to both postconsumer as well as pre-consumer commodities; however, this analysis addresses postconsumer commodities only.
3. Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) 2020. 2019 Recycling Industry Yearbook. https://www.isri.org/recycling-commodities/recycling-industry yearbook.
4. Recycled Commodity Values. Soft mixed paper consists of a clean, sorted mixture of various qualities of paper not limited as to type of fiber content. Prohibitive Materials may not exceed 1 percent. There are specific limits on the percent of contaminants allowed in soft mixed paper. Data were not available for ONP, metals, plastics and glass in 1997 and 1998. For plastics, glass and metals, there was a transition in data sources between 1996 and 1999 and between 2004 and 2005, so some of the change between years could be due to the methodology of the data source for capturing data.

   Additional sources include Secondary Materials Pricing and Secondary Fiber Pricing. 2003-2018. Accessed February 2020. Available at http://www.recyclingmarkets.net/. 1970 to 2004 historical data tabulated from weekly or monthly industry publications and averaged annually during the time periods shown. Publications included Waste Age Recycling Times, Waste News, Paper Recycler, Miller Freeman, Inc.
5. Waste 360. 2018. "EREF Study Shows Continued Increase in Average MSW Landfill Tip Fees". August 1. https://www.waste360.com/landfill-operations/eref-study-shows-continued-increase-average-msw-landfill-tip-fees
6. Sources include National Solid Wastes Management Association (NSWMA) Municipal Solid Waste Landfill Facts. October 2011 (Data from 1985 to 2008). Waste Business Journal. "The Cost to Landfill MSW Continues to Rise Despite Soft Demand." July 11, 2017 (Data for 2010 to 2015). Environmental Research & Education Foundation. "Analysis of MSW Landfill Tipping Fees" April 2018 (Data for 2016 and 2017). Waste 360. "EREF Study Shows Average MSW Landfill Tip Fee Continues to Rise". October 29, 2019. (Data from 2018).
7. MSW Generation: US EPA. 2020. Solid Waste in the United States: 2018 Facts and Figures working papers. Population: U.S. Census Bureau. Population Division. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population. PCE: Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). 2019. Tables 2.3.4 and 2.3.5.
8. Wood consumption in buildings also includes some lumber consumed for the construction of other structures. Data were not available to allocate lumber consumption for non-residential and unspecified uses between buildings and other structures except for railroad ties. Since non-residential buildings such as barns, warehouses and small commercial buildings are assumed to consume a greater amount of lumber than other structures, the amount of lumber for construction remaining after the amount for railroad ties is split out is included in the buildings source category.
9. Steel consumption in buildings also includes steel consumed for the construction of roads and bridges. Data were not available to allocate steel consumption across different sources, but buildings are assumed to consume the largest portion of steel for construction.
10. Names of the materials are slightly different in the generation versus management analyses, due to material categorizations across the various data sources and data availability. For example, in the generation analyses the term used is drywall and plasters, whereas in the management analysis the term used is gypsum drywall.

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