

City of Salem Waste Reduction Policy Statement

Introduction

Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) management in the United States began in the late 1800s, evolving from municipal dumps to sanitary landfills since the 1960s. As this system was adopted nationwide, various jurisdictions adapted it through regulations, administration, technology, and social changes. The proliferation of convenience and single-use products, alongside other consumer-driven societal shifts, has significantly increased the average waste generated, making MSW management an essential municipal service. The high volume of waste generation has led to the establishment of disposal systems and markets, including landfills and Waste-to-Energy (incineration) facilities. However, these methods, depending on their design and implementation, may cause negative health impacts and diminish the quality of life for those living near waste disposal sites, raising Environmental Justice (EJ) concerns regarding the siting of waste facilities. Waste management is regulated at the federal level by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and at the state level by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

Recycling, which began in the U.S. in the 1960s, was intended to divert waste materials from disposal by breaking them down to create new products. Despite large-scale educational campaigns, recycling has struggled to offset the increasing waste generated. Challenges such as high contamination rates (non-recyclable items in the recycling stream) and recyclable materials ending up in the trash have hindered its effectiveness.

Globalization has further complicated MSW management, as lower labor costs internationally have led to an influx of low-cost goods, including single-use items, packaging, clothing, electronics, and toys. While globalization has increased access to recycling markets, it has also resulted in significant contamination issues. For example, China, a major destination for U.S. exported recycling, implemented strict contamination standards, leading to many communities resorting to landfilling their recycling when compliance was not met. This situation eroded public trust in recycling systems.

The DEQ, as the regulatory authority in Oregon, has been working to decrease waste and increase recycling through two key laws: the Opportunity to Recycle Act and the Recycling Modernization Act. These laws emphasize the importance of waste reduction, increasing recycling, reducing contamination, enhancing yard waste collection and composting, improving equitable access, and educating communities.

City of Salem's Role in Municipal Solid Waste Management

The City of Salem resides in both Marion County and Polk County and is part of each of these county's watersheds. Within the Marion County watershed, the county holds jurisdictional authority over flow control—the ability to direct waste streams. Within the Polk County watershed, waste stream flow is determined by individual haulers. The City manages solid waste franchises for six haulers in Salem and is responsible for annual reporting to the DEQ, incorporating requirements from the Opportunity to Recycle and Recycling Modernization Acts regarding service minimums, the Uniform Statewide Collection List for Oregon, policy, and public education.

Policy Statement and Waste Reduction Goals

The City of Salem promotes waste reduction and recycling, working collaboratively with partners such as the Mid Valley Haulers Association to provide educational services around waste and recycling. With the recent implementation of the Recycling Modernization Act, the City has adopted the Uniform Statewide Collection List, designed to reduce confusion and ensure equitable access to recycling across Oregon. The City's overarching goal is to achieve a 56% reduction in the tonnage of waste sent for disposal (landfilling) across the City of Salem by 2050. Measurement would be across all lines of business based on 2016 generation levels at a per capita basis and consistent with State definitions and reporting standards. Additionally, The City intends to continue minimizing incineration to what is necessary for special wastes (medical, drugs, or otherwise required by law). These goals are aspirational within current recycling system technologies and based on increasing recycling, composting, and reusing of items currently supported in our system with a 90% compliance rate.

To achieve this vision, we will focus on the following strategies:

1. Support for a Circular Economy: We aim to foster partnerships with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Circular Action Alliance to promote practices that encourage the reuse, repair, and recycling of materials. By minimizing waste, extending the lifecycle of products, and supporting the right to repair, we can create innovative solutions that support a circular economy within our community.
2. Reduce Food Waste: Recognizing that food waste constitutes roughly 24% of municipal waste nationally, we aspire to serve as educators to consumers about the impacts of food waste. Studies show that consumers throw away about one-fifth of the food they purchase without even touching it, costing the average family of four approximately \$3,000 a year. By raising awareness and providing resources, we hope to influence behavior and reduce food waste at all levels. The City will also support expanding access to composting through education and services as required by the Recycling Modernization Act.
3. Increase Recycling Efforts: The City will continue to support recycling programs to divert materials from landfills and reprocess them into new products. We will expand access to recycling services, educate the community about proper recycling practices, and create policies that support increased recycling rates, as part of the Opportunity to Recycle and Recycling Modernization Act.
4. Minimize Harmful Waste: We are dedicated to minimizing the generation of harmful waste by promoting and educating on safer alternatives and responsible disposal methods. Through community education on the dangers of hazardous waste, we will provide resources for proper disposal and encourage environmentally responsible practices.

Through these efforts, the City of Salem aspires to create a resilient and sustainable community that values resource conservation and environmental stewardship. We invite all residents, businesses, and stakeholders to join us in this important endeavor as we work towards a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future for all.