

EPA'S CORE WORK HAZARDOUS WASTE

PROPERLY MANAGING WASTE

In our modern society, an enormous amount of waste is generated daily during manufacturing, industrial processes, wastewater treatment, agriculture, mining operations, garbage disposal and other activities. If not managed properly, this waste can cause serious damage to the environment and expose people to hazardous substances. Waste can be liquids, gases, solids such as garbage, or sludge, the byproduct of wastewater treatment and many industrial processes. It can be defined as hazardous or non-hazardous; some as corrosive or flammable.

The 1976 Resource Recovery and Conservation Act, often referred to as RCRA, directed EPA to protect communities and conserve resources through regulations and guidance that ensure the safe management and cleanup of solid and hazardous waste, and programs that encourage waste reduction and the beneficial reuse of materials. There are about 60,000 facilities regulated under RCRA across the country. Eighty percent of Americans live within three miles of one of these facilities and 50 percent live within one mile.

- **Non-Hazardous Waste** – EPA has been instrumental in helping states reverse decades of environmental damage and public health threats from the uncontrolled dumping of garbage in communities across the country. Under RCRA, open dumping of waste is now banned, and EPA has set criteria for the proper operation of municipal and industrial waste landfills, including their design, where they can be safely located and plans for cleanups or closures of existing landfills.
- **Hazardous Waste** – EPA has developed a comprehensive program to ensure that hazardous waste is managed safely from the moment it is created, during transport, treatment and storage and through its disposal (cradle to grave). The agency authorizes states to implement the federal permitting, enforcement and cleanup requirements.

Cleaning Up the Damage – EPA works with states and tribes to ensure cleanups of soil, surface water and groundwater at facilities that treat, store or dispose of hazardous substances under the “corrective action” provisions of RCRA. The agency issues permits and orders that guide facilities in conducting the cleanups, and requires financial assurances that the polluters will cover cleanup costs.

Improved Waste Management – EPA has created partnerships with a broad range of industries to help them transition to less polluting materials and change their processes and procedures to protect people’s health and the environment. As a result of EPA efforts and positive recognition, many companies now reuse materials that would have gone into the waste stream or worse, soil, water or air. The public benefits and the companies save money.

Increased Recycling and Reuse – EPA has been at the forefront of national efforts to prevent pollution through its sustainable materials management program, which looks at the life cycle of products and considers ways to reduce their environmental impacts, conserve resources and decrease costs in the process. EPA programs encourage the reduction and reuse of materials; recycling, especially of electronics; composting and the reduction of food waste. Innovative EPA programs have stimulated the increased use of sustainable materials, green practices and recycling in the construction industry, resulting in less pollution, reduced energy use and huge savings.