

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At an annual rate of over 2,700 pounds, Californians generate more trash per person than anyone else in the world. Each year, the entire State disposes of between 38 million and 40 million tons of solid waste. This amount is roughly 24 percent of the nation's total, even though California has only about 10 percent of the nation's population.

Solid waste is composed of a variety of typical items found in most garbage cans. Paper and paper products generally comprise the largest portion, followed by yard waste, food waste, glass, plastics, metals, rubber, leather, textiles, wood and miscellaneous inorganic waste.

There are four basic methods for disposing of or reducing solid waste: burying in landfills; burning in incineration facilities; recycling, including composting; and providing incentives or disincentives to diminish the volume of waste generated (source reduction). Each of these methods plays a valuable role in an integrated system of managing solid waste. In such a system, the various methods complement each other to safely and effectively handle garbage.

In September 1988, the Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy (also known as the Little Hoover Commission) began its study of solid waste management in California. The Commission identified the major issues related to solid waste generation and disposal, determined the role of state and local governments in developing policies and systems to manage solid waste, and evaluated the success of traditional policies of solid waste management and identified potential alternatives. The Commission's study resulted in the following findings:

1. California Lacks An Integrated System for Managing Its Solid Waste

Although state law outlines an effective policy of solid waste management which requires that the State employ various methods of waste disposal, California continues to rely on landfills to get rid of its garbage. Landfills continue to be the State's primary method of disposal because California's lead agency responsible for solid waste management policies has emphasized landfilling in past years and there has been little pressure to develop disposal alternatives. As a result, the State is generating more garbage than its landfill space can accommodate. For example, 15 counties are projected to exceed their landfill capacity by the end of 1996, and the entire State is expected to run out of landfill space by the turn of the century. Additional landfill space is difficult to develop because Californians do not want waste disposal facilities

developed near them. Other effects of the State's reliance on landfills is the exposure of some Californians to health dangers and threats to the environment in some areas. Several studies have shown some landfills to be the cause of groundwater and surface water contamination, methane gas migration, and an assortment of problems ranging from unpleasant odors and vector problems to noise and traffic problems. Finally, California's reliance on landfills will result in long-run financial costs stemming from the unnecessary depletion of natural resources and the skyrocketing prices of dumping garbage in landfills that are becoming increasingly scarce.

2. The State Lacks A Comprehensive Statewide Recycling Program

Supporting the rationale behind integrated waste management, state law and the concepts of conservation demand that recycling be a major part of California's system of handling garbage. However, because of a lack of leadership, the State has not developed a comprehensive recycling program. As a result, valuable resources are depleted unnecessarily and California continues to rely heavily on landfills as its primary method of waste disposal.

3. The California Waste Management Board Has Been Ineffective

Although it is the lead agency for managing the State's solid waste, the California Waste Management Board (CWMB) has failed to meet its responsibilities to encourage integrated waste management and discourage the use of landfills. Recent efforts by the CWMB have been more supportive of its statutory objectives, but the CWMB's effectiveness is still hindered by the public's attitude toward solid waste and the common perception that the CWMB is not independent of certain interests in the waste industry. As a result, California lacks a lead agency that can effectively address the State's current solid waste problems.

In addressing these findings related to the management of solid waste in California, the Commission's report presents five recommendations:

1. The Governor and the Legislature should enact legislation that explicitly establishes a statewide program that is based on a hierarchy in which source reduction is the first priority, recycling and composting are the second priority, environmentally safe incineration is the third priority, and environmentally safe landfill disposal is the fourth and last priority.
2. The Governor and the Legislature should require counties to establish solid waste programs that institute, where possible, systems for collecting garbage fees on a "per can" or "per bag" basis, and garbage collection billing systems

that segregate garbage fees from fees for other county billings. Further, the State's lead agency on solid waste management should establish an aggressive education campaign aimed at teaching consumers the values of conservation and efficient use of resources.

3. The Governor and the Legislature should enact legislation that requires local governments to prepare, adopt and implement plans that would divert from landfills through source reduction and recycling 25 percent of the waste generated within the jurisdiction of the local agencies. Further, the local plans should also attempt to specifically divert household hazardous wastes from landfills. Finally, the legislation should allow the local agencies to impose fees on the generators of waste to pay the costs of preparing, adopting and implementing the plans. These fees should include, but not be limited to, fees based on the amount of waste disposed of in landfills.
4. The State's lead agency for solid waste management should conduct a study to determine the costs avoided by increasing recycling. The study should also show how recycling can be increased through mandating the purchase of recycled materials by state and local governments and through the incentive of state tax credits. If consistent with the study, the Governor and the Legislature should enact legislation requiring state and local governments to purchase specified amounts of various recycled products. Further, the legislation should provide for tax credits equal to a specified percentage of the amount paid for recyclable materials generated in California, and tax credits associated with the purchase price of qualified machinery or equipment used to manufacture finished products composed of a specified amount of waste material.
5. The Governor and the Legislature should enact legislation that requires the State's lead agency to exist as an independent five-member board. The board should consist of members who have specified expertise related to managing solid waste. Further, the board should be subject to certain controls related to conflict of interest.