

ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT COMPARISON TOOL

A tool for understanding environmental decisions related to the pulp and paper industry



SOLID WASTE

EFFECTS OF RECYCLED FIBER USE ON SOLID WASTE

Options for Managing Solid Wastes

To address the effect of recycling on pulp and paper industry solid waste management, one must decide whether the concern is total solid waste generation or the amounts of solid waste that are not beneficially used. If one is concerned only with those wastes that are not beneficially used, it becomes necessary to define what constitutes beneficial use.

Of the solid waste that is not recycled (or composted) in the U.S., 82% is landfilled and 18% is burned for energy recovery (USEPA 2011). Burning with energy recovery in waste-to-energy plants is a practice that is often considered to constitute a beneficial use (USEPA n.d.). The benefits of recycling in reducing solid waste will, therefore, depend on (a) whether one is concerned with solid waste generation or only with MSW that is not beneficially used, (b) whether burning for energy is considered, like recycling, to be a beneficial use, and (c) on the specific waste management practices in localities where materials are discarded.

These same considerations apply to the management of mill wastes. In the U.S., NCASI site-specific data for 2010 indicate that about 60% of solid waste from U.S. pulp and paper mills is disposed of in landfills, a level that has remained fairly stable since 2000 (AF&PA 2002 *Environmental Health & Safety Report*), with the rest being beneficially used as fuel, land applied as a soil conditioner, and used in other beneficial use applications. Specific mills, however, may landfill all or none of their solid waste. Therefore, the benefits of recycling in reducing solid waste will also depend on (a) whether one is concerned with mill solid waste generation or only with mill solid waste that is not beneficially used, (b) whether burning for energy and land application are considered to be beneficial uses, and (c) the specific solid waste management practices of the mills involved.

On average across the U.S., because recycling removes much more material from MSW landfills than it adds to mill waste landfills, the overall effect is, in most cases, a significant reduction in landfilled solid waste.

References

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). n.d. <http://www.epa.gov/msw/facts.htm>

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2011. *Municipal solid waste generation, recycling, and disposal in the United States: Facts and figures for 2010*. EPA 530-R-13-001. Washington, DC: United States Environmental Protection Agency. <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/msw99.htm>