

What Is In Your Waste Stream? And Why You Should Know

Part one of the benefits of conducting waste and recyclables composition studies.

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Since the passage of the State's 75% recycling goal, many communities in Florida are developing new programs and making operational changes to increase waste diversion and recycling. Like any important decision, decisions regarding your solid waste programs should be based on facts and data. That's why knowing what is in your waste stream – not only material types, but also from which sectors they are being disposed – is vital to any solid waste decision maker.

One way to determine which materials are being disposed by various sectors of a community is by conducting a waste composition study (WCS). A WCS is a field study designed to determine the percentage by weight of specified material categories, including recyclable materials, disposed of by identified generator sectors. The most common generator types included in a Florida WCS are single-family residential, multi-family residential, and commercial/ industrial/institutional; however, additional generator sectors are often included depending upon how the study results will be used. For example, with the growth of organics recycling, many communities are using WCS events to identify large food waste generators.

Waste composition studies should be conducted periodically to monitor progress in your waste reduction programs or changes in consumer

trends. A WCS is especially important if considering program changes that require significant capital investment. A properly designed WCS, conducted by an experienced firm, will yield the following benefits:

- **Benchmark current recycling efforts or compare to previous studies:** Comparing the percentage of recyclables in the waste stream with that of future or past studies will provide an indication of the effectiveness of your recycling efforts.
- **Identify recycling opportunities:** WCS results identify the types of recyclable materials that constitute the largest percentage of the waste stream, as well as the sectors of the community that offer the most return on your financial and time investments.
- **Aid in program planning:** Study data can also be used to identify changes in waste composition that might impact other solid waste programs or facilities.
- **Identify seasonal variations**

in the waste stream: Waste stream composition can change with the seasons as a result of tourist populations, climate, and vegetative growth, and other factors. Multi-season studies can determine the effect of seasonal variation on the waste stream.

- **Assist in State reporting:** The FDEP requires each county to report the total tons of material generated and recycled by material type. WCS results can be used to accurately report these tonnages in lieu of the State's WasteCalc model.

Depending on the objective, WCS events can be developed to analyze waste streams as large as whole counties or as small as an individual business or specific community program. Regardless of the scale of the study, WCS results will clearly demonstrate what materials should be targeted for increased waste diversion. **After all, if you don't measure it, you can't manage it.**

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