

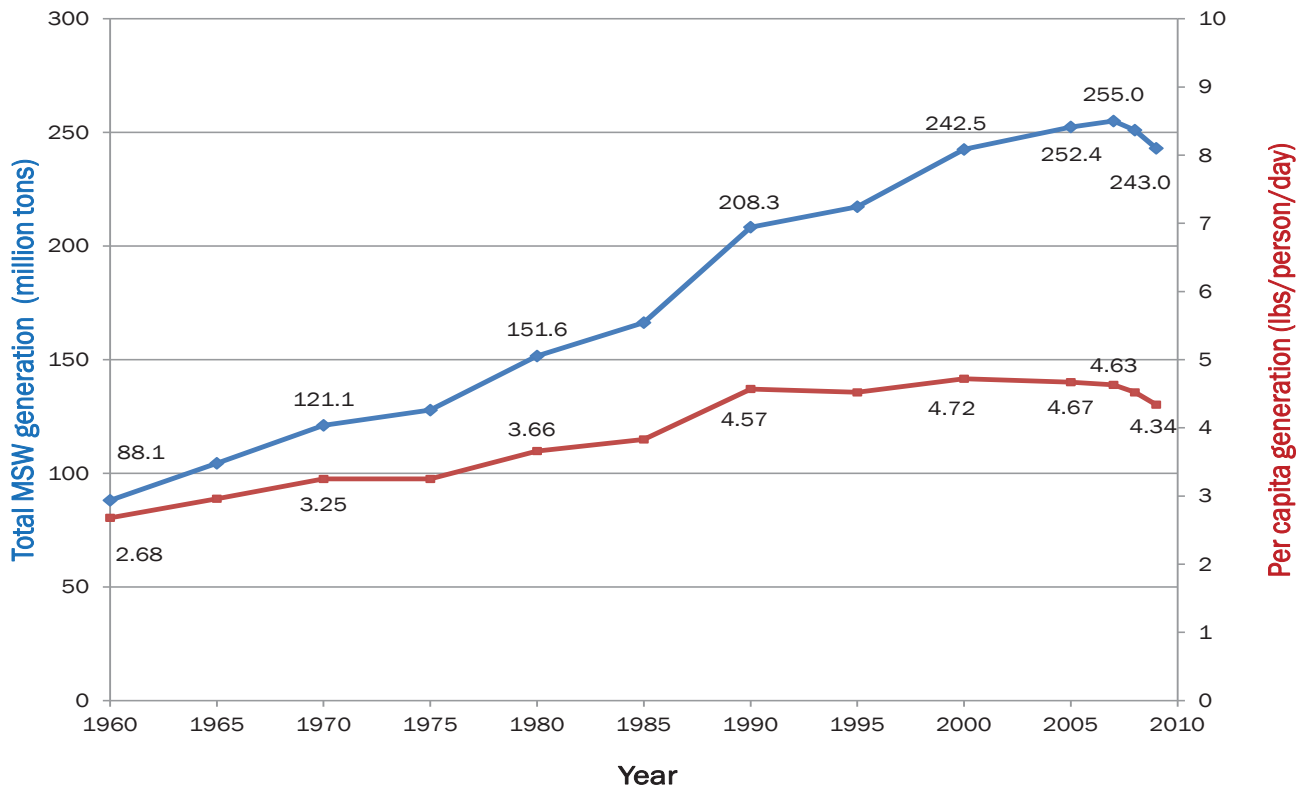


# MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE FACTS

Municipal solid waste (MSW) is comprised of everyday items such as product packaging, grass clippings, clothing, plastic and glass bottles, and food scraps. Not included in the standard definition of MSW are other materials that might be disposed of in MSW facilities such as construction and demolition (C&D) debris, municipal wastewater treatment sludge, and non-hazardous industrial wastes.

According to the latest data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 243.0 million tons, or 4.34 lbs. per person per day, of municipal solid waste (MSW) was generated in 2009. The amount of MSW generated has changed significantly since 1960 when only 88.1 million tons of MSW were generated. Generation rates increased steadily and peaked in 2007 at 255.0 million tons. MSW generation rates in 2009 were equivalent to the generation rates in 2000. Figure 1 shows the MSW generation rates from 1960 to 2009.

Figure 1. MSW Generation Rates



## NSWMA

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The per capita MSW generation rate in 2009 was 4.34 pounds per person per day (lbs/person/day) which was equivalent to the rate in 1988. This was a decrease of 0.33 lbs/person/day from the peak amount reached in 2005. In 1960, the per capita generation rate was only 2.68 lbs/person/day and increased every year until 1990. From 1990 to 2008, the per capita generation rate remained relatively constant.

The reasons for the divergence between the MSW generation and per capita lines can be explained by examining the materials in the waste stream. In 2009, paper and paperboard were the largest component of MSW at 28.2 percent. The other materials in the waste stream were: food scraps (14.1%); yard trimmings (13.7%); plastics (12.3%); metals (8.6%); rubber, leather, and textiles (8.3%); wood (6.6%); glass (4.8%); and other materials (3.5%).

Figure 2 graphically depicts the materials in the waste stream over time. The generation of paper and paperboard has had the greatest decline since its peak generation rate in 2000. The paper and paperboard and per capita plots closely resemble each other because this component comprises the largest portion of the waste stream by weight. In fact, the per capita generation and paper and paperboard plots mirror each other between 1960 and 1980. After 1980, the two plots diverge from each other. This is caused by a switch to the use of lighter weight beverage and food containers and a significant change in how paper is used. Glass bottles declined by 3.92 million tons (28 percent) and metal cans declined by 0.5 million tons (11.5 percent), while plastic containers increased by 3.95 million tons (286 percent). Paper consumption declined by 10 million tons from 2000 to 2008 because of major declines in the use of newspapers, office paper, and commercial printing.

Figure 2. MSW Materials

