

# **Analysis of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Trends in the United States between 1960 and 2015**

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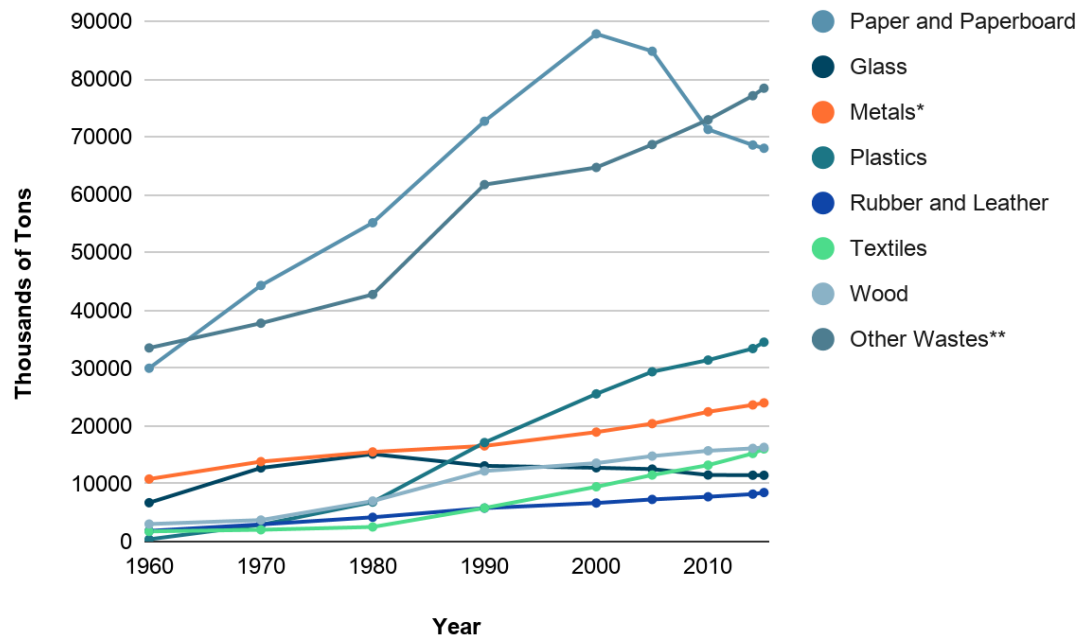
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## MSW Generated

Figure 1 shows how many thousands of tons of MSW have been generated between 1960 and 2015, broken down into 8 major categories.



\*Metals includes ferrous, aluminum and other nonferrous

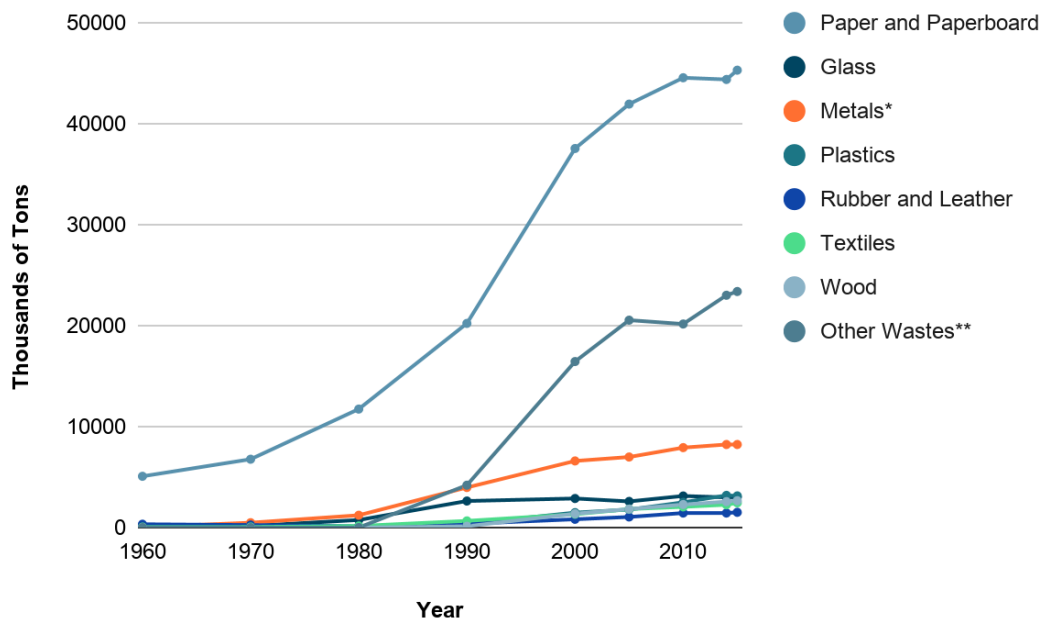
\*\* Other Wastes includes food, yard trimmings, and miscellaneous inorganic waste

Figure 1: MSW Generated between 1960 and 2015 (thousands of tons)

Analysis of this graph shows that total waste amounts in all categories have increased significantly from 1960 to 2015. Paper is the only category that showed a decrease in waste generation—from 87,840 tons in 2000 to 68,050 tons in 2015. Additionally, two categories show greater waste levels than all the others by several tens of thousands of tons: Paper and Other Wastes peaked at 87,840 and 78,440 tons respectively and the next highest waste level was Plastics in 2015 at 34,500 tons. Of the lesser six categories, Plastics had the highest increase in waste over time—it had the lowest waste level in 1960 at 390 tons, surpassed Glass, Metals, Rubber and Leather, Textiles, and Wood between 1980 and 1990 and peaked in 2015 at 34,500. [great!][I kind of question the init-caps on these MSW types but NBD]

## MSW Recycled

Figure 2 shows how many thousands of tons of MSW have been recycled between 1960 and 2015, broken down into 8 major categories.



\*Metals includes ferrous, aluminum and other nonferrous

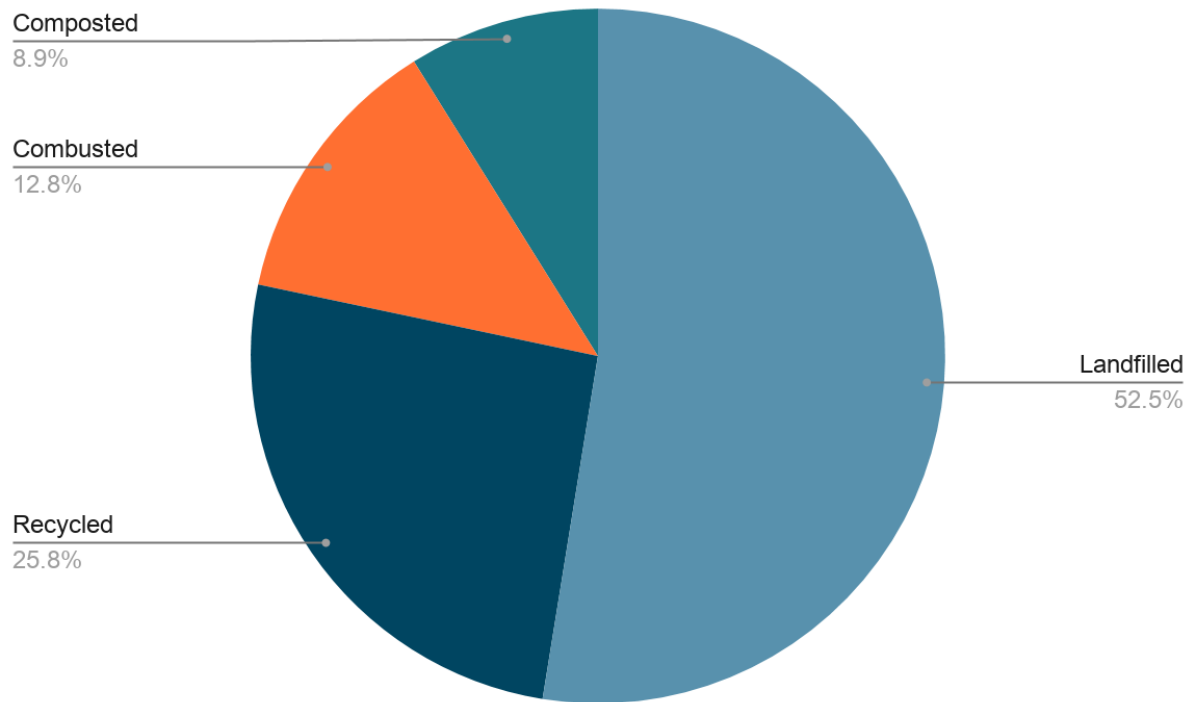
\*\* Other Wastes includes food, yard trimmings, and miscellaneous inorganic waste

Figure 2: MSW Recycled between 1960 and 2015 (thousands of tons)

Analysis of this graph shows that total recycling levels in all categories have increased from 1960 to 2015, however Paper and Other Wastes show significantly higher levels than all other categories. Paper had both the highest total levels of recycling and the greatest increase with 5,080 tons recycled in 1960 and peaking at 45,320 tons in 2015—these numbers correlate to the greater levels of waste produced by this category. Other Wastes had the second highest recycling levels, jumping from 4,200 tons in 1990 to 23,390 tons in 2015. All other categories showed low levels of recycling, only up to 1,200 tons until 1980 when the numbers began to increase slightly.

## MSW Management by US in 2015

Figure 3 shows what percentages of the 263.14 million tons of MSW generated in the US in 2015 were Landfilled, Recycled, Combusted, and Composted.



*Figure 3: Percentages of total MSW Generated that was Landfilled, Recycled, Combusted, and Composted by the US in 2015.*

Analysis of this chart shows that a total of 138.28 million tons of MSW was landfilled in 2015, which is over 50 percent of all MSW generated. Of the materials landfilled the most substantial category was food (22.3%), followed by plastics (18.8%) and paper (13.2%). All other categories landfilled showed a significant smaller percentage. A total of 67.77 million tons of MSW was recycled in 2015, the overwhelming majority of which was Paper at 69.9% of the total. There was a total of 33.7 million tons of MSW that was combusted in 2015, the top categories of which were Food (22.3%), Rubber, Leather, and Textiles (16.5%), Plastics (15.9%), and Paper (13.2%). Finally, of the 23.39 million tons of MSW that was composted, 91% of it was yard trimmings and the other 9% food.

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## Sources

United States Environmental Protection Agency. *Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2015 Tables and Figures*. US: Environmental Protection Agency, July 2018.