sanitation

What's in the Trash?
NYC Department of Sanitation Releases Waste Characterization Study

Study Looks at How Much Material New Yorkers "Throw Away" in Our Recycling Bins and Trash Cans

The New York City Department of Sanitation announced the release of its 2017 NYC Residential, School, and NYCHA Waste Characterization Study, the latest look at what New Yorkers put in their trash, recycling, and organics bins.

Results from the study include:
- New Yorkers are producing less waste at home than ever before— and 68 percent of what we do throw away belongs in a curbside organics or recycling bin.
- Organics—including food scraps, food-soiled paper, and yard waste—are the largest and still growing category of waste, representing the biggest opportunity for New Yorkers to divert waste from landfills.
- After New York State implemented an electronic waste disposal ban, e-waste has declined by 60 percent.
- New Yorkers are best at recycling cardboard and most often forget to recycling aluminum.
- Cartons and aseptic boxes—including milk and juice cartons—are the most commonly misplaced recyclable items.

"The study is first and foremost a reflection of what we buy, and choose to get rid of. It shows how consumer activity has changed through the years, and, hopefully, makes us think about the impact of our purchasing decisions," said Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia. "More specifically, this study tells us that our efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle our waste are working. The average New York City household throws away less and recycles more today than five years ago. The study also shows us that we have incredible opportunities to develop and grow programs to achieve even more. Together, we are working toward our goal of sending zero waste to landfills by 2030."

The Department conducted similar studies in 2005 and 2013. When results are compared through the years, waste characterization studies not only help to measure the success of diversion programs, but also provide broader insight into the evolving waste stream by documenting consumer consumption patterns and the design of products being discarded, which influence

what can and cannot be diverted. Waste characterization studies can also, in part, reveal the success of waste management policies and programs by measuring the reduction of targeted components of the waste stream.

The study provides data on each segment of the waste stream and provides context behind the observed changes. For example, in 2005 the average New Yorker recycled more than 100 pounds of newspaper. In 2017, this total was less than 20 pounds - reflecting the changing way we receive news. Also, as product manufacturers have modified their packaging, the study shows marked changes in certain types of recyclables including more rigid plastic containers and less glass containers.

The Department conducted the study over spring, summer and fall in 2017, and it fulfills the Department's requirements under Local Law 40 of 2010. It builds on decades of research and analysis into the evolving composition of our waste stream. Some 800 samples were hand sorted by the study team into 70 main sort categories and an additional 172 sub-categories to get a detailed understanding of the variety of plastic and paper products in the waste stream.

The study and accompanying documents may be found at http://nyc.gov/wastestudy.

About the New York City Department of Sanitation
The Department of Sanitation (DSNY) keeps New York City healthy, safe and clean by collecting, recycling and disposing of waste, cleaning streets and vacant lots, and clearing snow and ice. The Department operates 59 district garages and manages a fleet of more than 2,000 rear-loading collection trucks, 450 mechanical brooms and 693 salt/sand spreaders. The Department clears litter, snow and ice from approximately 6,500 miles of City streets and removes debris from vacant lots as well as abandoned vehicles from City streets.