

TALKING POINTS

Modern Landfills

December 2017

5 Things to Know About Landfills

- **Landfills follow strict regulations and are highly engineered**¹. Today's landfills feature numerous safeguards to minimize that surrounding communities do not face health risks such as contaminated drinking water. Since the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act² became law in 1976, landfills operate under strict regulations from federal, state, and local governments³ to protect the environment.
- **Landfills remain the best alternative for the safe and secure disposal of waste.** Today's landfills are highly engineered facilities⁴ with advanced technology to serve nearby communities⁵. While there are other disposal options including avoidance/waste minimization, plasma gasification, recycling, incineration, composting, waste-to-energy systems, and disposal in ocean/sea, landfills are still the one of the most efficient methods to dispose of our human-generated waste.
- **Landfills are environmentally friendly.** Landfills fill the gap between how we currently dispose of waste and getting to a more sustainable world. Landfills can serve as habitat for wildlife as a conservation area.
- **Landfills are a form of resource renewal**⁶. We know that recycling puts valuable resources back into the economy but landfills also provide a source for resource renewal by generating landfill gas that is often captured and converted to generate electricity that can power local communities, geothermal energy that can be used to heat buildings and greenhouses, and even neogas that can be used to power equipment and trucks. Active and closed landfills can serve as sites for alternative energy⁷ like wind farms and solar farms.
- **Landfills are an economic catalyst**⁸. Landfills offer significant economic benefits to the area it serves. Landfills create jobs and generate tax revenue for the local economy. Industrial parks located near landfills can take advantage of the renewable resources produced there.



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Lessons Learned

How society thinks about waste has changed. Federal, state, and local laws reflect how views have evolved.

- Recycling rates are increasing. In 1980, the recycling rate was less than 10 percent. In 2014, that rate has climbed to almost 35 percent.
- There are fewer landfills – down to 3,091⁹ active landfills from a peak of 8,000
- More people think about sustainability and our impact on the world than ever before.

The waste and recycling industry is adaptable. Since the 1930's with the first municipal waste facility¹⁰, through efforts to recycle and move toward sustainability, the industry continues to meet the needs of an evolving society. We are a partner in supporting a healthy planet.

In the late 1990's the industry established the Environmental Resource Education Foundation, an independent organization with the mission to fund and direct scientific research and educational initiatives for waste management practices to benefit industry participants and the communities they serve. It continues to support scholarly research to benefit the waste and recycling industry.

1 Estimate based on "Vehicle Use and Industry Survey", U.S. Census Bureau

2 "Greening Garbage Trucks, New Technologies for Clean Air", Inform, 2005

3 January 2014 estimates based on data from the industry and the Natural Gas Vehicles for America

4 "Tomorrow's Trucks, Leaving the Era of Oil Behind" Energy Vision, 2013

5 Natural Gas Vehicles for America, 2013

6 "Natural Gas Refuse Trucks: Driving Change in New York City", Inform, 2006

7 "Renewable Natural Gas: The Solution to a Major Transportation Problem", Energy Vision, 2012.

8 Natural Gas: How safe is CNG?" David S.T. Pearl, JD

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