



*Authors: Shannon Mischler &
Marc Schwalb*

Types of Waste

Waste is something most people don't want to think about. For the majority, waste is a by-product of what we do want to talk about. It's something we'd rather not handle, think about, and certainly not smell – but it's a necessary evil.

Few people have the time to monitor the associated costs on an ongoing basis, and it's not an easy job if you aren't familiar with the industry. For our purposes as waste disposal and expense reduction experts, waste is separated into twelve different categories. Below are the types of waste and how they're typically collected.

Garbage:

Garbage is what most of us think about when we hear the term waste. Regular trashcan garbage created by one or multiple people is known as Municipal Solid Waste, or MSW. Pre-consumer waste is known as Non-Municipal Solid Waste (NMSW) and is generated in the production of products.

Liquid wastes such as wastewater, fats, oil and grease, used oil, gases, sludges, or hazardous substances like cleaning fluids or pesticides also count as garbage, and they are typically collected and taken to a materials processing facility, transfer station or landfill disposal site.

Recycling:

Most people understand the basic concept of recycling – the conversion of waste materials into new materials and objects. Recycling benefits the world by preventing the waste of potentially useful items and reducing our overall consumption of raw materials.

Most cities across North America have recycling programs, and some major recyclable items include paper, cardboard, glass, bottles, jars, tin cans, aluminium foil, and certain plastics.

Compost:

In basic terms, compost is organic matter gathered to allow to decompose in a relatively contained environment. It has many great benefits as a soil conditioner, and it's very rich in nutrients for plant life.

Compost includes fruits and vegetables, meat (including bones) bread, flowers, leaves, coffee and tea, dairy, hair, egg

shells and food-soiled paper towels. Some things that aren't included are liquids, bio-plastics, sawdust, wood, grass clippings with herbicide, or dead animals.

Many cities have Green Bin programs that keep food waste out of our landfills. Instead, it's used to help growth in our gardens and parks.

Metal:

Unlike a lot of the others on this list, metal has monetary value, especially recovered metals that can be melted down and reused. Many major metal manufacturers end up selling their leftover scrap metal to recyclers who know the market value and will pay to take it off their hands.

Many places across North America also require scrappers to carry a scrap metal license before they can handle scrap professionally.

Electronics:

Electronic or e-waste is mainly comprised of discarded electrical or electronic devices. Some examples include appliances, light bulbs, TVs, computers, screens, phones, alarm clocks, and watches.

While these items also have monetary value, they are also intrinsically more dangerous to handle and dispose of than your average metal waste. Potentially harmful substances like lead, beryllium and cadmium are often used in electronics, and great care must be taken by those who handle e-waste in order to avoid unsafe exposure.

Wood:

Wood is a solid waste, and while it can be disposed of in a landfill, there are better options.

While you can reuse and recycle wood, there are also options such as



biomass-to-energy and wood processing facilities. Burning wood is fairly clean compared to most fossil fuels (though it still does result in emissions!) and taking your wood to a processing facility will often cost less than simply disposing it in a landfill!

Hazardous:

Corrosive, explosive, poisonous, flammable – hazardous waste is, well, hazardous.

Some examples include paints, chemicals, tires, batteries, light bulbs, appliances, aerosol cans, fertilizers, and freon.

Most cities and towns have dedicated acceptance days for hazardous materials – check your cities website for dates. When transporting hazardous materials, they should be tightly sealed in their original containers and never allowed to mix. Trained professionals should be available to accept these materials on those assigned days, and they will be ready to package, transport and store these materials safely.

Toxic:

While all toxic waste is hazardous, not all hazardous waste is toxic. In waste terms, “toxic” is used to describe waste that, when ingested or absorbed, is harmful or fatal to living organisms. While the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is able to designate any waste hazardous as they deem fit, and many toxic wastes would fall under that general umbrella, they also have another law for mitigating harm to the public caused by specifically toxic wastes. Some examples of toxic waste include lead-based paint, radon, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), asbestos, pesticides and herbicides.

Biomedical:

Biomedical waste is any that includes blood or tissue from operating rooms, morgues, labs, or any other medical facilities. It could also include anything used in treating a patient – from bedding to hospital gowns.

Biomedical is further separated into four categories (general medical waste, infectious medical waste, hazardous medical waste and radioactive medical waste) and has incredibly strict laws surrounding its handling and segregation.

Medical waste is handled by specifically trained, license-holding professionals.

Agricultural:

Produced as a result of various agricultural options, agricultural waste includes materials such as manure, poultry and slaughterhouse runoff, harvest waste, fertilizer runoff, pesticides, salt, and silt drained from fields. It also

includes general farm waste related to the growing of crops or raising of animals – vegetable waste, grape vines, fruit bearing trees and palm fronds.

Most agricultural waste, including animal carcasses, is handled directly by the farm owners and workers, but is still regulated by the government for safety.

Industrial:

Industrial waste is generally described as waste that was produced by an industrial activity, and includes materials that have been rendered useless during a manufacturing process. Factories, mills, mining operations and industries all produce industrial waste.

Dirt and gravel, solvents, chemicals, scrap lumber – these items can be hazardous or benign, and are often mixed with regular municipal waste.

Each of these categories are composed of sub-categories, all with different rules and regulations in regards to disposal, storage and care. At the end of the day – no matter how much we want to brush it under the rug – waste will be with humanity until its end. So it's best that we keep it in mind.

