



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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Solid Waste Reduction Rate Steadily Improves, Then Falls in 2002

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennesseans made progress toward reducing the amount of solid waste they dispose of, but the reduction efforts lost ground in 2002, a report by the state Comptroller's Office of Research found.

Tennessee's Solid Waste Management Act of 1991 set out goals for curbing the amount of material going into Tennessee's landfills. Using 1995 as the base year, the law anticipated a 25 percent solid waste reduction by the end of 2003.

Solid waste, as measured on a per capita basis and deposited into lined, Class I landfills, dropped from 1995 levels by 22.6 percent in 2000 and 24 percent in 2001, the report showed. But the waste reduction rate dropped back to 20.3 percent in 2002.

Figures from 2003 are not yet available.

"Left unchecked, solid waste can pollute Tennessee's air, water and land and represents resources that Tennesseans could reuse or recycle rather than disposing in landfills. Tennessee's effectiveness in dealing with solid waste disposal is critical to its economic and environmental health and the health of its citizens as the state's population grows," the report said.

The report found good news on the recycling front. The statewide number of recycling facilities jumped from 160 in 1992 to 580 in 2002.

Among other things, the 1991 law established planning regions to deal with waste disposal in a uniform manner. The law also set targets for cutting the amount of solid waste going into closely regulated Class I landfills, which have liners to prevent leachate from filtering into the ground and contaminating water. Beginning in 1996, solid waste deposited in largely unregulated Class III/IV landfills was counted toward a region's solid waste reduction goal.

"One group reported that approximately 0.5 percent to 1 percent of the total waste stream, including that waste entering Class III/IV facilities, is composed of toxic substances that can contaminate groundwater," the report said.

Old, unlined landfills are a particular concern because many were operating before state and federal regulation of landfills was initiated.

The report suggests the General Assembly, when considering reauthorization of the law in 2008, decide whether to keep the 25 percent target or repeal it and let the market take over.

The Department of Environment and Conservation's Community Assistance Division "should develop methods of measuring the effectiveness of local governments' use of grant funds to achieve the solid waste reduction/diversion goal in the law," the report said.

The Environment and Conservation Department also should find a way to fund searches for old, unlined landfills and a plan to address their associated problems, the report noted.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at www.comptroller.state.tn.us.

