

USDA Headquarters Trash Profile February 2011

Background:

During the past year, the USDA Headquarter Complex had an overall recycle rate of over 40%. Our waste diversion rate is significant higher. This is a significant improvement since FY 2005 when we were recycling about 20% of our waste. Since FY 2006, our waste stream has fallen significantly. We are currently generating less than half the waste as we were in FY 2006. A trash sort was conducted on February 28, 2011 to determine the effectiveness of our Waste Minimization and Recycling Program and to obtain insight to improve our program. The results were compared to the trash sort conducted a year ago to see where we had improvements/declines. Approximately 436 pounds of trash collected from the offices were sorted. Trash from the cafeteria and restrooms were excluded (as was the case last year.)



Findings:

Approximately 153 pounds of recyclable materials were removed from the 436 pound sample. This represents just over 35% of the waste. During our

trash sort in 2009, we found that approximately 27% of the trash going in the dumpster was recyclable and 23% of the trash was recyclable in 2010. This year we also sorted out the compostable materials. We found that 34 pounds was compostable materials. During this sort we saw a significant increase in recyclable materials in the office trash. .

Some people are still throwing manuals and other miscellaneous paper into the trash. We did not see a lot of high grade office paper or newspapers in the trash. Overall our collection rate for recyclable paper remains high.



Some of the 107 pounds of paper found in the office trash

There was very little cardboard in the trash stream. The OBSI staff is doing a great job of keeping this out of the waste stream. During inspections of the trash compactor, we notice from time to time that other users will throw cardboard into the trash compactor, but it represents a relatively low percentage of our waste.

A lot of plastic bottles are still in the trash stream. Though light in weight, they can take up a lot of volume. We appear to be recycling approximately 50% of the aluminum cans and plastic/glass bottles in the complex. The percentage of commingled containers found in the office trash was up modestly compared to last year (just under 9% compared to 5% last year.) Again, many of the water and soda bottles still had liquids in them which

represented another 2% of the waste by weight. Many of the bottles still had their caps screwed on, which makes them difficult to compact and reduces the volume of trash that our compactors can hold. As a result our trash hauler is hauling a lot of air and liquids; thus unnecessary hauling trips (and environmental impacts) are needed.



Cans and bottles pulled from office trash during sort

The sample was very small compared to past years (only 436 pounds.) During the sort we found a couple of heavy books that may have skewed the results. It appears that the staff understands that office paper is recyclable, but we need to address the increases in mixed paper that is in the waste stream. This year we sorted out the compostable waste from the offices to see what reductions are possible if we expand the compost collection program outside of the cafeterias. We found that less than 10% of the office

waste is compostable. Capturing the compostable plates, clam shells, bowls and cups will, therefore, result in modest reductions in weight.

Our waste minimization & recycle trends for the past 6 years. FY 2005 is our Baseline year.

