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Wisconsin launches waste characterization study at landfills as part of reduction effort

SCS Engineers crews will visit 12 landfills across the state to sort 400 municipal solid waste samples and visually characterize 640 construction and demolition waste loads. Results of the study will provide a planning tool for waste reduction and minimization efforts across the state.

SCS Engineers (https://www.scsengineers.com/), Long Beach, California, began collecting and sorting samples of municipal solid waste at landfills across Wisconsin in September as part of a study aimed at better understanding what the state's citizens are throwing in the trash.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources(DNR) (https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/), results of the study will provide a planning tool for waste reduction and minimization efforts across the state, and when compared to prior studies conducted in 2003 and 2009, will help officials identify trends in waste and recycling.

"Millions of pounds of materials are diverted through recycling, e-cycling or composting every year, which keeps hazardous materials out of the environment, saves valuable landfill space and supports Wisconsin's economy," Kate Strom Hiorns, DNR recycling and solid waste section chief, says. "But more can be done. This study will help determine the communication, infrastructure and resources still needed."

SCS crews will visit 12 landfills across the state to sort 400 municipal solid waste samples and visually characterize 640 construction and demolition waste loads. Crews are trained to identify 85 material types, representing eight waste categories including plastics, organics and hazardous materials. Region, hauler type and the source of the waste will also be recorded.

"The DNR is looking for opportunities to minimize and divert waste statewide, but also at the source or regional level," Casey Lamensky, DNR solid waste coordinator, says. "The DNR will continue to work with local governments, businesses and organizations to ensure they have the resources they need to divert materials from the landfill."

According to DNR, waste characterization data from 2003 and 2009 provided important information for waste management decisions still affecting residents today. For example, Dane County, Wisconsin, used the 2009 study (https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Recycling/documents/WI_WCS_Final_Report_June-30-2010.pdf), which identified construction and demolition materials as one of the top contributing material groups to its waste stream, to properly size a construction and demolition recycling facility at its Rodefeld Landfill.

"We hope the 2020 data will be similarly used," Lamensky says. "Dane County is a great example of why this information is important."

The final report will be published in the spring of 2021. From mid-October through mid-December, crews will be sampling at landfills located in the cities of Appleton, Wisconsin Rapids, Weyerhaeuser, Watertown, Muskego, Franklin, Menomonee Falls and Eau Claire.