

Solid Waste Trends

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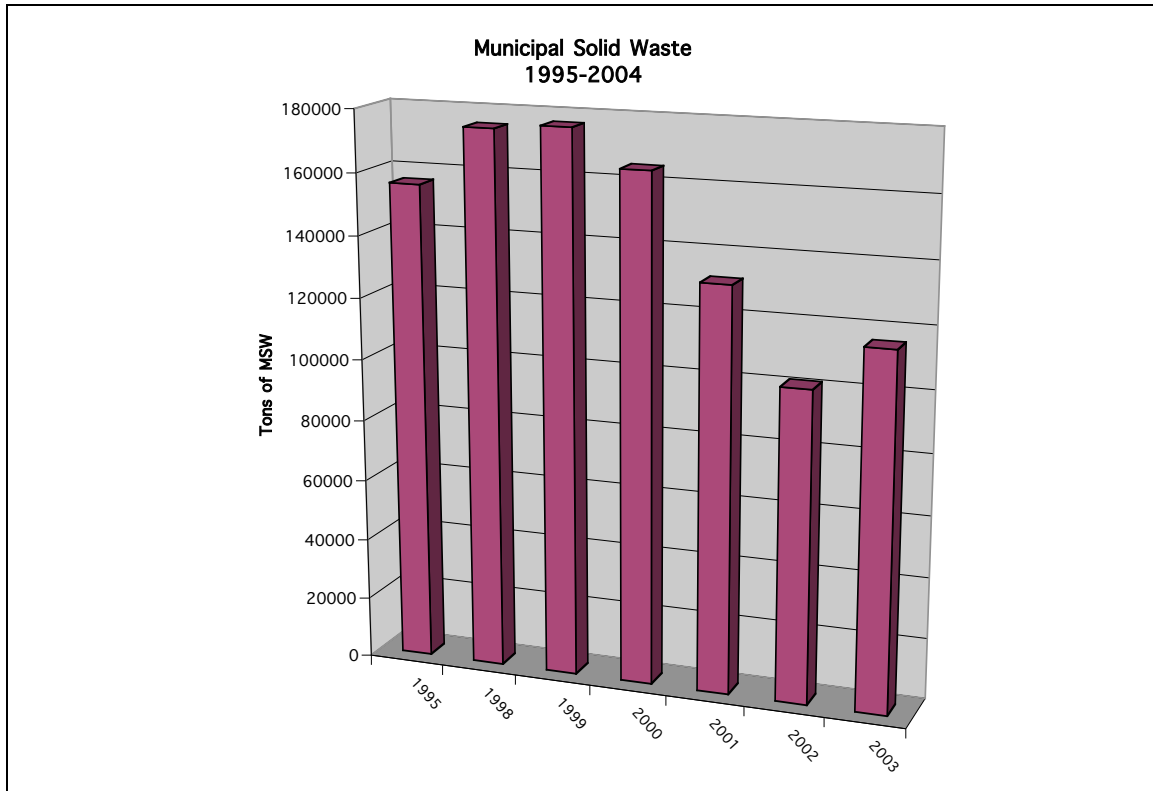


Figure 1

While tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) generated by almost all Cape towns (and the Cape overall) rose from 1995 to 1999, the per capita numbers show a decrease since 1999 (refer to Figure 1 above). This may be attributed to a number of factors, including an increase in the overall effectiveness of local recycling programs combined with a decline in the amount of waste being discarded. It is unlikely that any decrease in MSW being generated is also an indication of a slowdown in consumer purchases that may coincide with changes in the national or regional economy. These changes may explain why MSW tonnages have decreased by approximately 29 percent between 1999 and 2004, while recycling tonnages have increased by approximately 32 percent during this same time. Per capita, the amount of MSW generated has decreased fairly significantly since 1998, while recycling has increased. Again, this is likely a reflection of towns working to implement the policies of the Department of Environmental Protection Solid Waste Master Plan, which seeks to reduce the generation of MSW and increase recycling through the implementation of various policies.

As previously stated, fluctuations in the amounts of waste generated and disposed (whether it be MSW, construction demolition or recyclable materials)

can be good indicators of economic activity, population growth and possible environmental degradation. An increase or decrease in the purchase and consumption of goods will serve to either increase or reduce the generation of discarded materials, thereby impacting waste management activities and costs that must be borne by either the individual homeowners or the municipality. Economic activity, population growth and environmental degradation can also be considered sub-indicators, revealing trends that may serve as overall indicators of sustainability on Cape Cod.