

# Municipal solid waste management issues

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Some waste from commercial sources like hospitals is also separated as hazardous and handled with extra care to prevent the spread of diseases. Prof. Scott emphasized the philosophy of environmental sustainability in the management and disposal of municipal solid waste. Disposal methods are based on reusing, recycling, power generation, and incineration. Recycling and reuse methods are appropriate for glass, plastic, paper, and metal waste products; biodegradable materials like kitchen waste and other non-hazardous waste that can not otherwise be reused or recycled are shredded, packed as pellets and used as fuel for power generation. Hazardous waste like hospital cotton, plastic syringes, diseased body parts removed through operations, etc. is all sent for incineration. A landfill is another common method and is more appropriate for construction waste or for material with very little calorific (hydrocarbon) value.

Discussing the positive and negative aspects of the different methods, Prof. Scott informed that landfill method is relatively safe for short periods of time but might allow leaching of undesirable and toxic chemicals into soil/groundwater resources. Incineration causes air pollution and hence is not permitted for certain types of plastics, which when incinerated give out objectionable chemical compounds into the air that we breathe. Finally, power generation from municipal solid waste is not always economically justified. Hence, the three R's of environmental management viz., reduce, reuse and recycle assume extra significance for municipal solid waste management. Effective segregation and collection of waste for the three R's plan is still a challenge for most municipalities around the world.