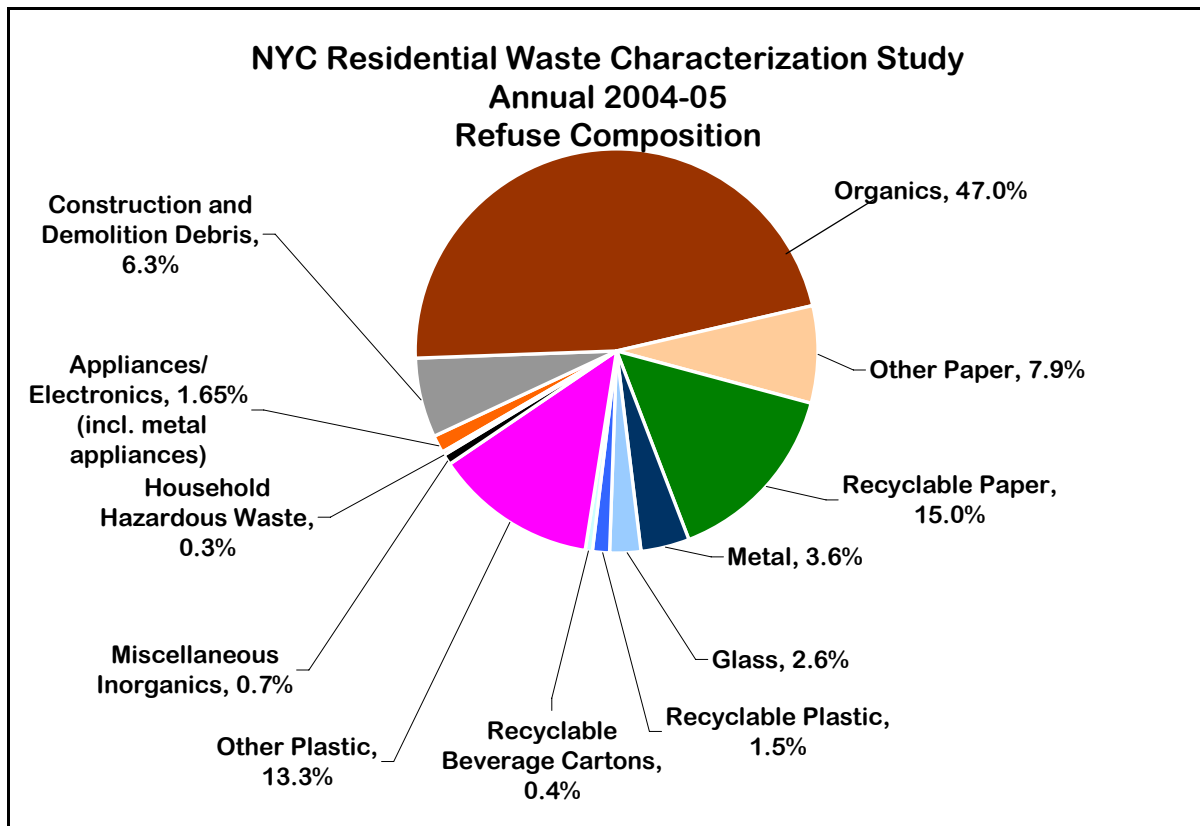


RESIDENTIAL REFUSE

“Refuse” refers to what we call garbage, rubbish, or trash. It is what is put out at curbside in black bags or trash cans, and collected for disposal. Although it may incorrectly contain some materials that should be recycled, it is distinct from recycling. An average of 53,000 tons of residential refuse is collected citywide each week. That comes out to 33 pounds a week per household; 1.9 pounds a day per person.

COMPOSITION



We see that organic¹ materials constitute the majority of refuse, followed by paper, and by plastics. Construction and demolition debris also makes up a sizeable chunk. Other inorganic materials constitute considerably less.

In fact, over 64% of all trash is composed of organic materials, paper, or plastic. Other inorganic materials (metal, glass, ceramics, rubble) make up the balance.

¹ Of course paper is also an organic material. For the purposes of this study, however, we treat paper as a separate group, because most (though not all) paper is designated for recycling under NYC curbside recycling program.

The information herein has been compiled, analyzed, and reported by the DSNY Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling, using data collected by its consultant R.W. Beck. These highlights do not substitute for a thorough review of R.W. Beck's Final Report, which contains more detailed data. Some percentages may not total exactly due to rounding.

HOW MUCH REFUSE SHOULD HAVE BEEN RECYCLED?

Under the current curbside recycling program, NYC targets cardboard, newspaper, and mixed paper; all kinds of metal; glass bottles and jars; plastic bottles and jugs; and aseptic packaging such as milk and juice cartons. These are *designated recyclables*.

Roughly 23% of what is thrown out in New Yorkers' garbage cans consists of currently designated recyclables: 15% of this is paper; the rest, 8%, is MGP.

Smaller Fractions

Appliances and Electronics constitute a relatively small fraction of trash, less than 1.5%. And that's counting metal appliances that could be recycled, as well as plastic appliances like hair dryers or vacuums. E-waste, defined as TV's, audiovisual equipment, cell phones, and all computer-related components, is less than 1% of trash.

Household hazardous wastes, in total, account for a mere 0.3% of disposed refuse. PVC plastics are only 0.03%. Styrofoam constitutes 0.64%. These waste materials are high profile, but not high mass or volume in the trash.

As you read on:

Citywide Results Across Seasons – refuse tables present a detailed breakdown of the 91 material categories in the trash. All of the above results are taken from these tables. You can also compare refuse composition with the composition of other streams, like recycling, by looking at each season's Citywide Results-At-A-Glance table.

If you are interested in understanding the differences in refuse composition by income and housing density, consult each season's "Housing Density and Income Details" tables for refuse. And remember, in this study, "refuse" is distinct from "waste" (refuse + recycling).