

Cape May County's Unique Waste Challenges

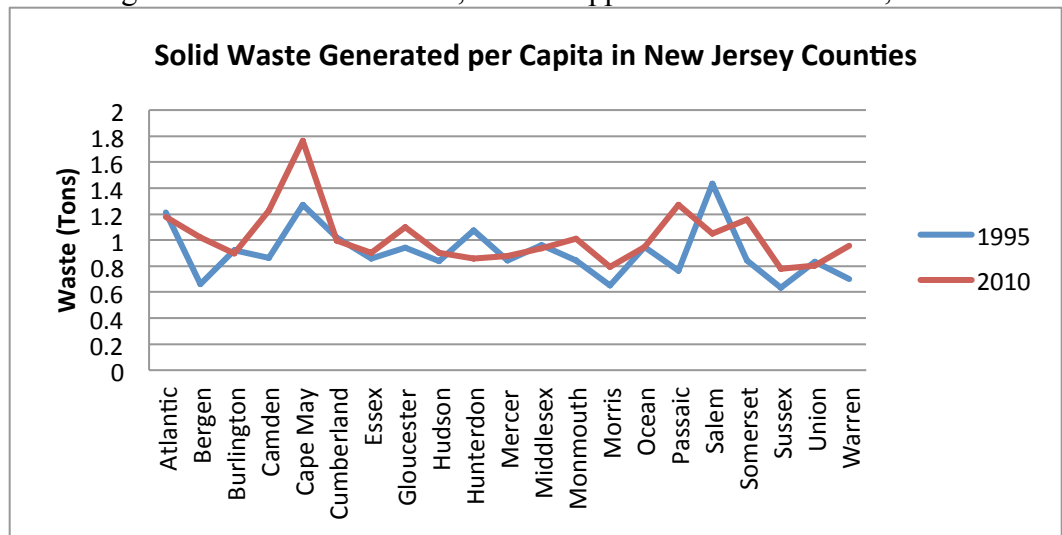
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The Travel and Tourism industry in New Jersey is an important and dynamic aspect of the state's economy. The New Jersey Commerce Commission (NJCC) estimates that the Travel and Tourism industry is the second largest private sector employer in the state, contributes approximately \$30 billion in economic activity annually, and generates 416,000 jobs (NJCC, 1). In 2003, over 65 million people visited New Jersey; tourism activity generated \$2.9 billion in state and local government revenues (\$1.7 billion in state tax revenue and \$1.2 billion in local government tax revenue). (NJCC, 1). The four counties that compose New Jersey's Shore region are very significant in the state's tourism market and its economy as a whole. Stretching approximately 127 miles along the coast, Monmouth, Ocean, Atlantic, and Cape May counties are responsible for more than 72 percent (\$21.6 billion) of the state's annual economic activity. In 2004, the gaming industry in Atlantic City (located in Atlantic County) employed 50,000 workers and took in \$4.8 billion (NJCC, 1). Although the Travel and Tourism industry is a vital source of economic and occupational opportunity in the state of New Jersey, it is also a source of waste generation by the travelers visiting the area.

From an initial glance, the solid waste generation statistics of Cape May County look staggering. For nearly two decades, Cape May County has been the greatest or second-greatest producer of total solid waste per capita in New Jersey. The following estimates of total solid waste include both municipal waste and "bulky" waste. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) categorizes municipal waste as household waste (private residences), commercial waste that originates in wholesale, retail or service establishments (restaurants, stores, markets, theaters, hotels and warehouses), and institutional waste material (schools, hospitals, research institutions and public buildings). (NJDEP, 2012) The NJDEP classifies bulky waste as "large items of waste material, such as appliances and furniture, discarded

automobiles, and large vehicle parts. In 1995, Cape May generated 1.27 tons of solid waste per person, compared to an average of 0.89 tons per person for the other 20 counties in the state (NJDEP, 2014). In 2010

Cape May generated 171,485.81 tons of solid waste, approximately 1.76 tons per person (NJDEP, 2014). Remaining well above the county average of solid waste generated per capita, Cape May's 2010 estimate more than doubles the numbers of other much more populated counties in the state, such as



Source: NJDEP NJ Generation, Disposal and Recycling Statistics.
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw/recycling/stats.htm>

Union (0.80 tons per person with a population of 536,499) and Mercer (0.875 tons per person with a population of 366,513) (NJDEP, 2014). With an estimated population of only 97, 265 residents in 2010 (NJDEP, 2014), Cape May County receives assistance from the annual flood of seasonal visitors in generating the county's waste. Cape May alone experiences a massive increase in its waste-producing population, as the number of county inhabitants expands from around 100,000 year-round residents to over 634,000 people during the peak of the summer season (NJCC, 1).

Overall, Cape May County effectively manages the waste generated from both its year-round residents and its seasonal visitors. The Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority (CMCMUA) has outlined actions taken in its Solid Waste Management Program to manage the increase of waste during the travel season. Most of the cities in the county, especially the beachfront and resort cities, change their residential curbside waste collection from once per week in the Winter season to twice per week during the Summer season (CMCUA, 2006). The CMCMUA also effectively operates its Solid Waste Transfer Station to facilitate the disposal of a significant portion of the county's solid waste, reducing the amount of collection vehicles needed on the roads and reducing the amount of traffic for residents and tourists (CMCUA, 2006). While the CMCMUA Solid Waste Management Program runs effectively, it seems to focus more on the management of residential waste rather than that of the county's visiting tourist population. Other locations that are home to popular travel destinations have taken notice of the impact tourism has on solid waste generation, and have implemented ecological approaches to limiting the amount of waste generated in those areas. For example, in the Caribbean, in which the hotels and resorts of some regions produce more waste than all the local residents combined (CAST, 2001), source reduction and composting are important methods for limiting the amount of waste produced by tourists. The implementation of compost piles for food and yard wastes and policies limiting the use of plastic bottles and straws have reduced waste production in resorts (CAST, 2001). The Half-Moon Hotel in Jamaica was able to cut its monthly garbage hauling cost by more than 50%, from \$1,700 to \$620 (CAST, 2001).

The suggestion of refining measures taken to manage food waste does not only apply to the county of Cape May. Cape May's neighboring county, Atlantic, includes a nationally renowned tourist and travel destination: Atlantic City. The bustling town of Atlantic City is home to several casinos, hotels and waterfront resorts. Across the country, a Nevada based hospitality, gaming, and entertainment company has recently taken part in more sustainable practices in regards to the food waste produced by its properties. MGM Resorts International is the owner of several famous resorts along the Las Vegas strip, such as the Bellagio, MGM Grand, and Mandalay Bay, has implemented recycling and food waste management programs into all of its resorts. The MGM Resorts properties have rapidly increased their food recovery quantities from 3,350 tons in 2007 to 14,000 tons in 2011. The recycled food waste is distributed among two main collectors: RC Farms and A1-Organics. RC Farms, a pig farm in North Las Vegas, removes nonedible items from the waste and is able to feed 3,000 pigs per day with the food waste collected from the resorts on the Strip. The rest of the food waste from the Strip resorts goes to A1-Organics, a composting company. The efficient system currently distributes about half of the food waste to the pig farm, and half to the composting facility. The USEPA's Waste Wise Program awarded MGM Resorts International a Gold Achievement Award for Food Recovery in 2011. (Zanolli, 2012).

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