

DRAFT: VISION AND GOALS

What is Zero Waste?

Zero Waste is different from traditional waste management that focuses primarily on what happens to materials once they are discarded. Zero Waste recognizes “waste” is not inevitable, and discarded materials are potentially valuable resources. While maximizing recycling and composting are still important, there is also an emphasis on reducing consumption and designing “waste” out of the system.

The goal of Zero Waste is to eliminate the negative impacts of designing, producing, using and discarding of products and packaging. Waste prevention, recycling, and composting saves energy, diverts material from landfills, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Zero Waste also seeks to minimize production of toxic materials, and provide safe options for discard of products containing toxic materials.



These negative impacts and their remedies may occur at any of three stages of the product cycle:

1. “Upstream” refers to resource extraction, and the design and manufacture of goods. While state and federal government efforts and voluntary industry efforts are necessary, consumer decisions can help also create change. For example, buying recycled content paper increases the demand for paper made from the materials collected in recycling programs rather than from trees, and producer decisions in developing and making products.
2. “Midstream” refers to consumer decisions made in purchasing, using, and reusing products. For example, the Citywide Garage Sale provides residents a means for lengthening the useful life of consumer products. The City’s environmentally preferable purchasing program uses the City’s purchasing power, coupled with that of many other jurisdictions, to leverage change by purchasing products that are more energy efficient, water conserving or durable.
3. “Downstream” refers to what happens to materials after discard, including recycling, composting, and disposal. Recyclables, yard trimmings, and “solid waste” (mixed discarded materials) are collected from Mountain View residents and businesses and processed at the SMaRT Station[®] in Sunnyvale to recover useful materials. Recovered materials are sold, and the remaining residue is sent to the Kirby Canyon Landfill for disposal.

Activities at all three stages are closely connected, and tend to reinforce each other. For instance, midstream consumer decisions drive producer decisions upstream. While recovery of recyclables and organics are key parts of the solution, the Zero Waste approach looks at materials from the time resources are extracted for manufacture until the products and packaging are no longer useful.

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Changing How We Think

Zero Waste challenges us to consider how we use language. A “discard” is not “waste” unless, and until, it enters a landfill. “Yard waste” can more appropriately be termed “yard trimmings” or “yard debris”, and “food waste” becomes “food scraps”. In a Zero Waste world, all discards are processed to recover useful materials. Zero Waste actions, program design and spending priorities are guided by scientifically-derived data and analyses. For instance, plastic and paper bags are often considered equivalent, but looks can be deceiving. When tested, a paper bag can hold over two times as much material as an “equivalent” plastic bag. Therefore, the environmental impacts from paper bags should be compared 1:2 to plastic bags.

Eventually all decisions made during the product life cycle will be governed by full cost accounting – whether those decisions are made by manufacturers, consumers, or those managing discards. “Full cost accounting” means taking all costs into account, and doing so on a fair and equal basis. The impacts of product design, manufacture, use, and discard, such as generation of greenhouse gasses, should all be factored in.

In an ideal world, full-cost accounting would include ending all of the various government subsidies that favor one technology or material over another, including those for oil, gas, and metals exploration and extraction, and for timber production. In the meantime, consumer purchasing power provides the most powerful means for effecting change. The Zero Waste Plan focuses on what Mountain View can do locally, as well as how the City and its residents and businesses can best influence Zero Waste-related decisions made elsewhere.

Mountain View’s Zero Waste Vision¹

“By 2025, all discarded materials in Mountain View are recovered for their highest and best use, and no materials are sent to landfills or incinerators.”

To achieve this vision, the City will work to:

1. Educate and engage businesses, organizations, public agencies and residents.
2. Adopt and implement supporting policies and Zero Waste Action Plans.
3. Support legislation and adopt policies that require minimized environmental impacts through improved product design.
4. Ensure that facilities and infrastructure are in place to properly manage all recovered materials.

¹ The Vision and Interim Goals may be modified to correspond to public input, the City’s contractual commitments and program requirements, and City Council direction.

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Measuring Progress with Diversion Goals

Two goals are proposed to measure the City’s progress in achieving the recommended 2025 Zero Waste Vision. By emerging standards, 90% diversion is considered achieving zero waste:

1. By 2015, Mountain View residents and businesses will divert 80% of materials from landfill.
2. By 2020, Mountain View residents and businesses will divert 90% of materials from landfill.

The Plan will address means for measuring progress towards each of these interim goals. Possible methods include “per capita disposal” (pounds per day disposed to landfill for each resident or business) and a simple percentage reduction in the total amount of material sent to landfill each year.

Zero Waste Snapshot – Reduction in Disposal Needed to Reach Goals

The table below provides a snapshot of what would be required in terms of reduced landfill disposal today to reach the goals tomorrow, based on an average of the past four years of disposal quantity:

	Annual Disposal to Landfill	Equivalent Diversion Rate	Time Period
4 Year Disposal Average	56,600 Tons	73%	Now
Interim Zero Waste Goal	<42,000 Tons	80%	By 2015
Minimum Zero Waste Goal	<20,000 Tons	90%	By 2020
Minimum Necessary Decrease in Disposal by 2020	36,600 Tons	Close the 17% gap	By 2020