

Waste in numbers

Which waste

The waste we produce every day is defined Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) and includes whatever is discarded during our daily activities. All other waste is defined special waste, which includes waste produced by industrial activities, handcrafts, hospitals, etc.

In order to simplify waste management, MSW is subdivided according to its composition, also known as the product fraction. There are six main categories: 1) recyclable materials (paper, plastic, glass, etc.); 2) compostable materials (kitchen leftovers, garden trimmings, etc.); 3) bulky materials (sofas, furniture, etc.); 4) durable goods, waste electrical and electronic equipment (computers, TV sets, refrigerators, etc.); 5) dangerous urban waste (batteries, drugs, car batteries, etc.); 6) residue (whatever is not classified in the previous categories).

MSW can be considered a kind of documentation regarding the use and life-styles of those who produce them. In fact the types of waste differ not only from one state to another but also within the same state (for example, waste produced by a town and by the countryside, or by different areas of the same town). If we analyse the average hypothetical rubbish bag of the Italians, we will discover that most of the waste produced, up to 40% of the total, consists of compostable materials. The other main component of our waste consists of recyclable materials (about 48%) subdivided according to the raw material they are made of: paper and cardboard paper (20-30%), glass (7-10%), plastic (10-14%), metals (4-6%), wood and textiles (5-7%). The remaining part consists of durable and dangerous waste.

How much waste

In general, it can be stated that, as in the past, the production of urban waste is proportional to riches, or better to the pro capita Gross National Product (GNP). In most cases, in fact, the inhabitants of the rich and industrialized countries produce more waste than those in the poor and developing countries. In the European Union, in 2014, the States with the largest production of urban waste were Germany (50 million tons), France (33,7 million tons), Italy (29,6 million tons) and the United Kingdom (31,1 million tons). Most of the pro capita production instead, was from Denmark (758 kg/inhabitant per year), Cyprus (617 kg/inhabitant per year) and Luxemburg (616 kg/inhabitant per year). In 2015 in Italy, about 29.5 million tons were produced, with a pro capita production of about 486,7 kg: this means that each one of us produces an average of 1.3 kg of waste per day. These quantities can become equally precious energy resources and raw materials, but an integrated recovery and treatment system must be created, as foreseen by the Ronchi Decree. Otherwise large quantities can mean only big problems with regard to management and impact on the environment.

(Source: EUROSTAT; ISPRA, *Rapporto Rifiuti Urbani*, 2016)