

Problems of waste recycling in Ukraine

Today, the most complicated threat to the environment is the problem with waste. Human activities generate trash, and how these pollutants are handled, collected, and disposed of can pose environmental and public health problems. Proper and safe solid waste management is critical to provide healthy living conditions for the inhabitants all over the world.

In Ukraine, the amount of garbage is regularly increasing. The country is simply drowning in waste since unofficial landfills expanding is also commonplace here. Unlike other affluent countries, huge volumes of garbage output and poor infrastructure of waste management mark the situation in Ukraine.

Despite recent legal measures, no substantial improvement in waste management has been made since Ukraine's independence. The ways Ukraine manages waste recycling today are characterized by the negative impact on nature and human health. There are also trends for inadequate utilization and improper disposal of dangerous waste.

According to the latest data, Ukraine generates more than 10 million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) per year. More than 95% of it is dumped in landfills. Over 15% of garbage disposal facilities do not meet sanitary standards. There are few options for expanding active landfills as well.

During the period 2014–2017, Ukraine took critical first measures to improve the issue. The country adopted a strategy for waste management in Ukraine. Its ultimate goal is to fully comply with EU standards by 2030.

However, there is still a large gap between Ukrainian and EU waste definitions and classifications today. In Ukraine, waste classification is solely based on toxic indications. The definitions of waste management operations found in Ukraine's actual Waste Law differs from those found in the EU. Moreover, the lists of waste in the EU and Ukraine do not correspond and statistic figures on waste in Ukraine are still very unreliable.

Significant amounts of accumulated waste without appropriate infrastructure and effective measures to prevent waste generation have exacerbated the ecological crisis and became a stumbling block to Ukraine's national economy.

Over 12 million tons of solid garbage were generated in Ukraine in 2019. The most common technique of managing this waste is to remove and pile it in dumps. There are more than 5,000 landfills in Ukraine today, 300 of which are overloaded. The majority of them do not meet safety requirements and environmental standards. Furthermore, experts believe that over 99 percent of functioning landfills do not meet European requirements.

Unprocessed home waste can no longer be disposed of in landfills as of January 2018, according to the law, and Ukrainians must separate rubbish and dispose of it in special containers. Despite this, Ukraine is currently on the lowest rungs of waste management, with no or limited waste prevention measures. Other recovery steps are implemented only initially, and landfill disposal remains the primary waste management technique.

The reason for that fact is that Ukraine lacks the required infrastructure and government programs. The introduction of new technologies is hampered by a lack of proper coordination, as well as financial resources and economic incentives. If any innovative technologies are implemented, it is a limited quantity.

To address all of the aforementioned issues, a Strategy for boosting effectiveness in the Ukrainian municipal solid waste management sector should be established.

Ukraine must renovate and build MSW landfills following EU regulations. The introduction of separated collection, sorting, and recycling of certain portions of sorted trash is crucial. On the regional and municipal levels, the relevant market mechanisms should be fully implemented.

It has to be a step-by-step strategy that starts with realistic and simple projects for waste treatment. There is no more time to lose and wait for another ecological catastrophe to strike the country.

There are three simple steps, which, if implemented wisely, are going to improve the situation with waste recycling in Ukraine significantly:

1. Construction of up-to-date modern sanitary landfills.
2. Implementation of a basic yet effective waste separation system.
3. Large-scale waste-to-energy plants for every big Ukrainian city.

Ukraine has established a goal of harmonizing its environmental legislation with those of the EU. Without a National Strategy for MSW Management and a plan to implement it, it will be impossible to meet the EU-set targets. The implementation and monitoring of both should be handled by a single government organization with agency status.

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