



COOL 2012

Compostable Organics Out of Landfills by 2012

www.cool2012.com

PROBLEM:

Landfilling food and paper is heating the planet.

As communities work to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, the first place to look is in the garbage can.

Every day, communities across the U.S. send tens of thousands of trucks to bury biodegradable materials such as paper products, food scraps and yard trimmings. These materials amount to half of our discarded resources. When buried in a landfill, those lettuce heads, grass clippings and paper boxes don't just break down as they would in nature or in a compost pile. They decompose anaerobically, without oxygen, and in the process become the number one source of human-caused methane and a major player in climate change.

There's no time to lose in cutting methane.

We're facing a rapidly closing window of opportunity before greenhouse gas emissions reach a tipping point and the effects of global climate change severely alter life on earth. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from vehicles and utilities have been identified as major culprits. However, the emerging story in the fight against global warming is the tremendous and previously underestimated impact that methane has as well. **Methane is now understood to be 72 times more potent than CO₂ over a 20-year period. This means our landfills emit the greenhouse gas equivalent of 20 percent of U.S. coal-fired power plants every year!**

Meanwhile, back on the farm...

Intensive farming and shortsighted land use management have been spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere for more than 100 years. This contributes to one-third of the increase in atmospheric CO₂, while stripping our soils of carbon and other essential nutrients. Rather than applying organic material to replenish the soil, modern industrial agriculture relies upon huge quantities of polluting petroleum-based, energy-intensive, greenhouse gas-generating fertilizers to produce crops on declining lands. Soils hold twice the carbon stocks of plants. Releasing this carbon through tilling means the soil now contributes to, rather than protects against, global warming. It also compromises the ability of soil to grow our food. **We're wasting the very carbon and nutrients our soils so desperately need to sustain our society.**

SOLUTION:

Get COOL.

The quickest and cheapest way to immediately reduce your community's greenhouse gas emissions.

COOL 2012 Campaign: While we work toward longer-term, challenging solutions like shutting down coal-fired power plants and taking cars off the road, the easiest, first step that can produce significant climate results **RIGHT NOW** is to **STOP** landfill-produced methane. Simply by getting COOL — Compostable Organics Out of Landfills — by 2012, we can prevent potent methane emissions AND build healthier soils. Taking the COOL step replenishes carbon stocks and supports sustainable agriculture, yielding healthier foods for our population. **The technology exists, the need is certain and the time to act is NOW.**

It's easy to be COOL by 2012.

Seize the Paper: Commit to recycling a minimum of 75% of all paper and composting the rest by 2012. Paper is the largest share of biodegradable materials in a landfill, so recycling and composting paper products will take the largest bite out of your community's methane emissions. The infrastructure to recycle and market the paper already exists; the key is to make it happen.

Source Separate: Require source separation of residential and business waste into three streams: compostables, recyclables and residuals. Source separation is pivotal to maximizing the environmental and economic potential of these resources.

Feed Local Soils: Support local farmers and sustainable food production with community composting infrastructure. The benefits of amending soils with composted organics are well-proven to increase long-term soil productivity, reduce irrigation needs and use of petroleum-based synthetic fertilizers, and increase water infiltration from today's frequent and intense storm events.

Stop Creating Methane Now: No matter how the waste industry "greenwashes" its "new and improved landfills," there is only one proven method to truly prevent methane emissions — keep compostable organics out of landfills. Public policy needs to first support the elimination of methane by requiring source separation of compostables and recyclables, then mitigate methane from existing sources where organics have already been buried.

Learn more about what your community can do by visiting www.cool2012.com for fact sheets, presentation materials, best practices, and strategies for becoming a COOL community.



The COOL 2012 campaign was created by the GrassRoots Recycling Network, BioCycle Magazine and Eco-Cycle.