



# Oslo eager to import trash to solve fuel shortage

As some landfills in the United States fill to capacity, Oslo is facing a very different problem — a trash shortage.

The Norwegian capital, which burns garbage to generate heat and electricity, has more demand for waste than supply, the New York Times reports. Nearly half the city of 1.4 million is heated by burning garbage, including household trash and toxic and industrial waste.

With not enough local trash to keep its incinerators running, Oslo has turned to importing rubbish from England, Ireland and Sweden, according to the report. City official Pal Mikkelsen, managing director of Oslo's waste-to-energy agency, is even interested in importing waste from the United States, he told the Times.

Oslo is not the only European city in the market for more garbage. Since burning trash is a common way to generate energy in Northern Europe, Oslo must compete with Austria, Germany and neighboring Sweden for its supply. As a whole, Northern Europe produces 150 million tons of waste per year, not nearly enough to run at full capacity the region's incinerating plants, which can use more than 700 million tons, according to Mikkelsen.

One of the reasons burning waste for heat and energy is more popular in Europe than the United States is simply that there is less space for landfills in small European countries, said Lars T. Angenent, an associate professor in biological and environmental engineering at Cornell University. In addition, energy prices are higher in Europe, adding an incentive to utilize any resource that's available, he said.

"At the end of the day, it's a choice that society has made," Angenent said. "Countries like the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Norway, they really want to be less dependent on fossil fuels."

In the United States, it's becoming more common to heat homes with waste heat from sources such as small businesses, especially in small towns and new housing developments, Angenent said. Such systems create centralized heating for a town or housing development, rather than each home using its own boiler, he said. Burning waste similarly generates heating for homes in Europe.

Although technology is available to remove harmful dioxins from gas released by waste-to-energy plants, some still have a psychological barrier to accepting incinerators in their communities, Angenent said.

"People don't want to live next to a trash burner," he said.

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