

Sweden wants Norway's trash (and lots of it)

October 28 2012, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org)—Sweden is hungry for trash and has turned to Norway for an offer it would find hard to refuse, no pun intended. Sweden is asking its neighbor for trash. Sweden's success is Sweden's problem. Sweden is a model recycler. Thanks to a highly efficient waste management system in Sweden, the vast majority of this household waste can be recovered or reused. As a result, Sweden has run short of garbage. Since it does not produce enough burnable waste for its energy needs, Sweden is suffering a downside to being such an enviable model of recycling. The average in Europe of trash that ends up as waste is 38 percent. Sweden's is 1 percent.

The numbers are from Eurostat, which said only 1 percent of waste from

Swedish households ends up in landfill, in contrast to 38 percent for European countries. In Sweden, some of its waste is either recycled or is composted. Sweden has turned to neighboring countries for their excess waste. Sweden is on an import drive of eight hundred thousand tons of [trash](#) from the rest of Europe per year to use in its [power plants](#). Much of the import is coming from Norway. The waste is to satisfy Sweden's Waste-to-Energy program, with the end goal of converting waste into heat and electricity. Norway is amenable to the agreement as exporting a portion of its trash is more economical than having to burn it. In the plan, [toxic waste](#), ashes remaining from the incineration process, filled with polluting [dioxins](#), will be returned to Norway.

While tapping its European neighbors for their garbage might seem unusual, Sweden does not consider itself such an odd duck; rather, as a forward-thinker when it comes to energy efficiencies and the use of waste to supply people's energy needs.

For Sweden, burning garbage in incinerators generates district heating, where heat is distributed by pumping heated water into pipes through residential and commercial buildings. It also provides electricity for homes. Sweden's strict standards limit emissions from waste incineration and most emissions have fallen considerably because of technical development and better waste sorting. Earlier this year, Catarina Ostlund, a senior advisor for the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, said that in the future, waste will be valued even more. "Maybe you could sell your waste because there will be a shortage of resources within the world," Ostlund said.

Beyond Norway, [Sweden](#) eyes Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and the Baltic countries as possible options for garbage; they are countries that "landfill" a higher percentage of waste than Norway. "I hope that we instead will get the waste from Italy or from Romania or Bulgaria or the Baltic countries because they landfill a lot in these countries. They don't

have any incineration plants or recycling plants, so they need to find a solution for their waste," she said.

More information: www.pri.org/stories/science/en...he-nation-10428.html

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