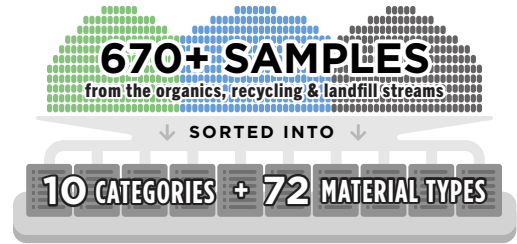


Alameda County Waste Characterization Study Findings

To better understand what types and amounts of materials are in our waste stream, StopWaste periodically conducts waste characterization studies at material processing facilities throughout the county. Our latest study is the first to examine all three streams – landfill, recycling, and organics – and reveals some promising trends in overall waste tonnage in Alameda County while illuminating ongoing challenges related to consumption, sorting, and contamination. Below are some key trends and takeaways:

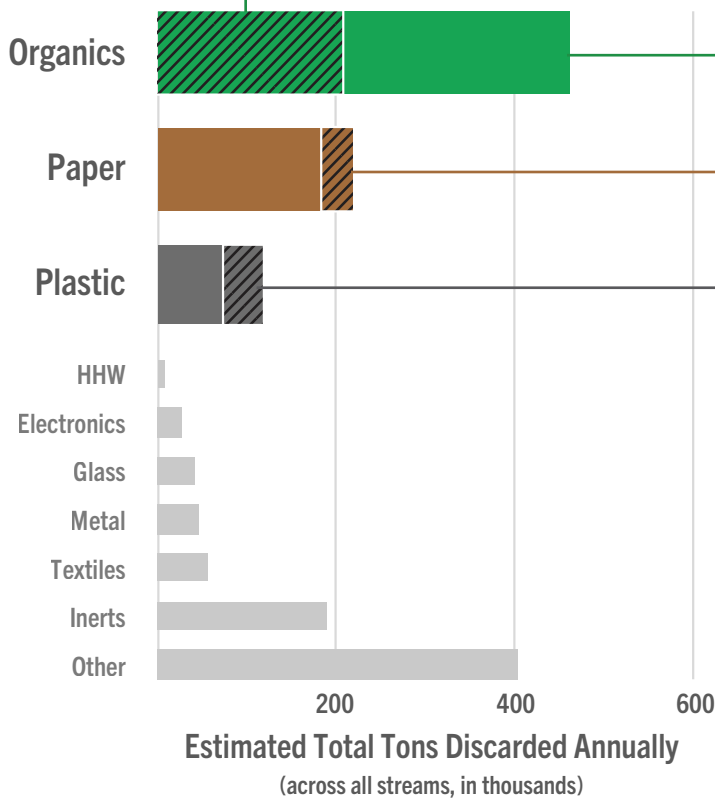


COMPOSTABLE ORGANICS & FOOD IN THE LANDFILL

Compostable organics like food and plant debris represent the largest single category of material in our waste stream. Although trending in the right direction, **nearly half of the total compostable organics still end up in the landfill**, where they release methane, a harmful greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

FOOD WASTE & PACKAGED FOOD

Around half of the compostable organics is food, and while much of that is inedible, there's still a significant amount that could have been eaten but was instead thrown out. **The study also highlighted a notable level of discarded food still in its packaging, which results in either increased food in the landfill, or plastic contamination in the organics stream.**



CARDBOARD AN ISSUE DESPITE RECYCLING SUCCESS

Paper is the third largest category of our waste stream (after “other”), consisting mostly of corrugated cardboard. It’s encouraging that the majority ends up in recycling, but **over 20% of cardboard still ends up in the landfill** where it contributes to climate change. When laid side by side, that remaining amount of landfilled cardboard boxes is enough to wrap all the way around the globe.

PREVALENCE OF FILM PLASTIC

Another trend is the presence of plastic, almost half of which is film plastic (pallet wrap, wrapping around toilet paper, cases of soda, etc.) **Film plastic is a particularly problematic material since it is not easily recyclable, can get caught in machinery, and is difficult to remove during organics processing.** Plastic bags were a relatively small component of any stream.

In partnership with our member agencies and hauler partners, StopWaste will use the data and insights from this study to inform our priorities and refine our programs, as well as track progress toward waste prevention over time. Click to learn more about the [2024 Waste Characterization Study](#).