

*From Pollution to Prevention: A Progress
Report on Waste Reduction*

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FROM
POLLUTION
TO
PREVENTION

A PROGRESS REPORT
ON WASTE REDUCTION



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Foreword

Public interest in protecting health and environment by preventing the generation of hazardous wastes and environmental pollutants is rising. Some companies are discovering that prevention is easier than they thought and that its economic benefits come quickly. Much is happening; only eight months after the release of the Office of Technology Assessment's report, *Serious Reduction of Hazardous Waste*, a great deal of new information is available. In particular, the Environmental Protection Agency has delivered its report on waste minimization to Congress.

The Subcommittee on Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources of the House Committee on Government Operations requested this special report to bring into focus congressional policy options on reducing the generation of all hazardous wastes and environmental pollutants. The report examines the effectiveness of the limited Federal actions taken so far and summarizes what industry and State and local governments have done to implement waste reduction. These programs are encouraging, and they help us understand what congressional policy options might accomplish. This special report discusses in greater detail several options that first appeared in *Serious Reduction of Hazardous Waste*.

There is agreement between EPA and OTA on the basic benefits of waste reduction. However, OTA sees more waste reduction possible in the near-term and, if the Federal government is to become more engaged with prevention, more need for policy development, organizational change, and institutional commitment. OTA places greater emphasis on the benefits of applying waste reduction in a multimedia fashion to cover all wastes and pollutants regardless of whether or how they are regulated.

Results from an innovative 2-year waste reduction program in Ventura County, California, show how government can assist industry to reduce waste generation and demonstrate that success in waste reduction is possible without traditional, prescriptive regulations. This program, several State waste reduction programs, and a 10-year-old Federal energy conservation program prove that in-plant technical assistance is an effective way to overcome obstacles to waste reduction.

Both industry and government benefit economically from waste reduction. The study shows how the competitiveness of American industry *and* environmental protection can be improved by devoting more resources to waste reduction and thus quickly reducing the costs of pollution control.

Many people in industry and government assisted OTA in the preparation of this work. A number of people reviewed a draft of this special report. As with all OTA reports, however, the responsibility for its contents is OTA's alone.

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