

The problems of solid waste management in Rio Grande – RS, Brazil

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Solid waste is an increasing problem in today's society. It is the consequence of our consumption habits and it tends to increase with development. There is no way of avoiding this problem, one can only try to diminish its impacts. When considering a port city, the waste management system should also be concerned about the solid waste produced by the port and by the ships that stop there. This is the case of Rio Grande, a city located in the south region of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Rio Grande has the second largest maritime port of Brazil (when considering the total movement of containers); it is also considered the Brazilian port of Mercosul (an economic treaty among countries of South America). Rio Grande has a potential to develop, particularly considering its tourism and port related industries, which could have dramatic social and environmental consequences. A negative impact likely to occur is the increase in the amount of garbage produced, which is expected to have profound environmental consequences in Rio Grande. The city does not have a well developed program to recycle its solid waste, which are presently deposited in an open dump site. This dump site is situated only a few feet away from the Patos Lagoon and is surrounded by a community. Even though it seems logical that the dump site has impacted the adjacent area, there are no studies that show the nature and extent of the damage the dump site has caused on the surrounding area. Another issue which concerns Rio Grande and its solid waste is the building of a landfill. For the port to become more efficient and to comply with the federal law, the port has to be able to receive and process the solid waste from the ships. However, this can only be done if the city has a landfill. In order to obtain a license to build a landfill, the city must present a project to restore and rehabilitated the area of the dump site. All of those issues are inter-related and they could be more effectively addressed if there was cooperation among the port authority, the municipality, the university (FURG) and the community. An integrated waste management program is necessary. In order to achieve this, the first step is to educate the community, so they will become aware of the problems and they will also understand how important their participation is in the process.