

Recycling rates increased rapidly in the United States and across the developed world in the 1980s and 1990s but have remained relatively flat in many countries since about 2005. Could increases in incineration and a possible "feed the beast" mentality associated with efficient incineration make the recycling of some materials obsolete? In this paper, a conceptual model is delivered to better explain the possible trade-off. The model is then tested using novel data in Japan that includes both unused excess incineration capacity and recycling rates across municipalities and across time. Results suggest that, when controlling for other variables, excess incineration capacity indeed reduces recycling. These results suggest that future planned increases in recycling may be frustrated by increases in incineration.