

Everybody has a Role

Everyone is responsible for creating — and solving — the garbage problem. Working together is the key to closing our national garbage gap.

Consumers need to be responsible for learning about the products and packaging they buy and the waste their households and offices contribute. Consumers can buy products with longer lives, that are recyclable or recycled, and with less packaging. Citizens can participate in local recycling of newspapers, cans and bottles, and they can compost their backyard wastes. Consumers need to understand the real costs and be prepared to pay for their trash disposal. And they need to recognize the need for local garbage facilities.

Business and Industry are responsible for including source reduction, reuse, and recyclability in their product design and packaging. Manufacturers need to use recycled materials whenever possible. As large consumers, businesses and industries need to buy recycled and recyclable products. Moreover, corporations can be important leaders in community waste management programs.

Waste Management Companies are responsible for working with their communities to plan and carry out integrated waste management practices. Waste companies, including recyclers, *must make sure they operate with the public safety and health in mind.* They need to require that their operators are well trained. Waste companies can help develop markets for recycled materials, also. And waste companies can help educate the public about ways to reduce the garbage problem.

State, Local, and Tribal Governments are responsible for managing the trash of their citizens. Governments should plan for the best combination of integrated waste management components to prevent or solve their own garbage dilemma. Recycling should play a key part in reducing dependence on landfills. Educating consumers is their responsibility, too.

The Federal Government is taking responsibility for leading the charge to solve the garbage problem through regulations, guidance, education, technical assistance, and by using its purchasing power.

A Challenge for Our Throw-Away Society

This brochure briefly describes EPA's recently issued draft report "The Solid Waste Dilemma: An Agenda for Action." All citizens are encouraged to get a free copy of the report by calling EPA's RCRA Hotline at 1-800-424-9346 or, in Washington, DC, 382-3000. See if you think it will work and find out what you can do. Then write to EPA or express your views at one of the following public hearings:

September 27, 1988 — The Landmark Center;
St. Paul, Minnesota

October 12, 1988 — Sheraton National Hotel;
Washington, DC

October 12, 1988 — Hotel Queen Mary;
Long Beach, California

October 17, 1988 — Sheraton Century Center
Hotel; Atlanta, Georgia

To present oral comments at one of the hearings, notify in writing:

Municipal Solid Waste Task Force
P.O. Box 7219
Silver Spring, MD 20910

If time allows, people may register at the hearings to speak. Written comments are due by the end of November. Send to:

EPA RCRA Docket (WH-562)
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Please identify comments with reference number F-88-SWDA-FFFFF.

Public Hearings on EPA's
Draft Report "The Solid
Waste Dilemma:
An Agenda for Action"

St. Paul — September 27
Washington — October 12
Long Beach, CA —
October 12
Atlanta — October 17

For a copy of the report
and more information,
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Washington, DC, 382-3000.

Office of Solid Waste
United States
Environmental Protection
Agency
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20460

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Office of Solid Waste



The Garbage Problem:

A Proposed Action Agenda



The Garbage Problem Defined

Each of us throws away over 1,300 pounds of garbage annually. Last year we Americans produced 158 million tons of waste — enough to fill a convoy of 10-ton garbage trucks reaching half way to the moon. And the convoy is getting longer!

At the same time, we are running out of places to dispose of our trash. The gap between what is produced and where to safely dispose of it has become a national garbage problem.

What's in our garbage? Mostly it's ordinary paper — from our homes, offices, and industries — and yard wastes — leaves and grass, brush, and tree clippings. Glass, metal, plastic, food, and organic wastes comprise the remainder.

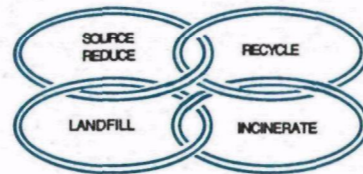
Currently almost all — 80% — of this garbage is landfilled. By 1993, however, one-third of our landfills will be full. Very few new landfills are being built because people are alarmed about health and environmental threats landfills may cause. The same fears have limited the construction of new incinerators and recycling facilities.

To add to the problem, only 10% of our waste is recycled, even though recycling can greatly reduce the amount of trash needing disposal. And efforts by product manufacturers to design products with built-in waste efficiency, including less packaging, have been minimal. Shoppers — all of us — continue to buy for convenience, giving little thought to what happens to the part we throw away. As a result, our trash problem is mounting.

As we continue to produce more and more trash and find fewer and fewer disposal sites, the cost of disposal is soaring. Unable to find local sites, some cities are even shipping their garbage elsewhere. Some communities are paying over \$100 a ton to dispose of their garbage.

An Agenda for Action

Closing the growing gap between the increasing amount of garbage that we produce and the dwindling number of places to discard it is a national challenge. To meet that challenge, EPA has proposed an action agenda to help form a national consensus on how we, as a nation, can deal with our growing garbage problem. The draft agenda, briefly summarized below, emphasizes that each of us has a key role in solving the problem. The agenda's success will require a partnership among consumers, manufacturers, waste managers, and all levels of government. EPA encourages everyone to review the draft agenda with a critical eye and to provide the Agency with comments. The centerpiece of the proposed Agenda for Action is "integrated waste management."



What is Integrated Waste Management?

Integrated waste management is a tool local communities can use to reduce the garbage gap. Its components are

- Reduce the toxicity and amount of waste.
- Recycle, including composting.
- Incinerate, with or without energy recovery.
- Landfill the remainder.

In integrated waste management, each of the four parts complements the other. Using the combination that best addresses its own unique needs, each local community custom designs its own waste management system.

Guiding Principles

The action agenda also stems from strongly held EPA views that

- Planning and implementation of integrated waste management is best conducted at the state and local level.
- A safe and permanent way must be found to eliminate the gap between the amount of waste and the handling capacity in landfills, incinerators, and recycled material markets.
- Reduction, reuse, and recycling are preferred methods for reducing the amount and toxicity of waste to be landfilled or burned. EPA even set a 25% goal for reducing and recycling trash by 1992.
- All waste management practices need to be safe.

Key Objectives

EPA has proposed six key objectives to deal with the garbage problem.

1. **Encourage participation in solving the waste problem through increased informational and educational efforts, technical assistance, and research.** "How-to" guides for waste managers, educational materials for citizens, peer exchanges, and a national information clearinghouse are among the proposed activities to improve decision making.
2. **Step up state and local integrated waste management planning.** Cooperative planning among industry, individuals, EPA, and state and local agencies can help close the gap.
3. **Increase "source reduction" activities.** Minimizing the volume of waste and toxicity of products and extending products' useful lives is what EPA means by "source reduction." Proposed are actions promoting waste audits, reduced packaging, and the use of less toxic materials in products. A study of federal procurement practices is also proposed.

4. **Increase recycling.** Recycling can divert huge volumes of waste from landfills and incinerators. To boost recycling, the Agenda for Action proposes to stimulate stable markets for recyclables and compost, explore incentives, and promote buying recycled goods.
5. **Improve incinerator safety.** Safe incineration of trash can be a useful technique for reducing waste volume and producing energy. EPA proposes making incineration safer through operator training, plans for ash disposal, upgraded performance standards, and studying the effects of banning certain materials from burning.
6. **Reduce health and environmental risks from landfills.** To increase landfill safety, EPA intends to require that landfill design and operating standards be met and the Agency encourages operator training. Technical assistance is proposed to help waste managers upgrade landfills. Of course, we will all need to reduce the amount of waste that needs to be landfilled.

