

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 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 be sure that their operators are well trained. Waste companies can help develop markets for recycled materials and educate the public about ways to reduce the garbage problem.

Local Governments are responsible for managing the trash of their citizens. They 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.

State Governments are responsible for regulating, permitting, enforcing, and, in concert with local governments, planning for waste management.

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 report *The Solid Waste Dilemma: An Agenda for Action*. You are encouraged to get a free copy of the report by calling EPA's RCRA Hotline at 1-800-424-9346 or, in Washington, D.C., 382-3000. Find out what you can do to help make it work. For additional information, you may contact your EPA Regional Office solid waste representative.

Region I

JFK Federal Building
Boston, MA 02203
(617) 573-9687

Region II

26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10278
(212) 264-3384

Region III

841 Chestnut Building
Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 597-3159
(215) 597-8990

Region IV

345 Courtland Street, N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30365
(404) 347-3433

Region V

230 S. Dearborn Street
13th Floor (HR-11)
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 886-7452

Region VI

First International Bldg.
1201 Elm Street
Dallas, TX 75270
(214) 655-6760

Region VII

726 Minnesota Avenue
Kansas City, KS 66101
(913) 236-2852

Region VIII

999 18th Street
One Denver Pl., Suite 1300
Denver, CO 80202-2413
(303) 293-1496

Region IX

215 Fremont Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 974-8926

Region X

1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 442-1260

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

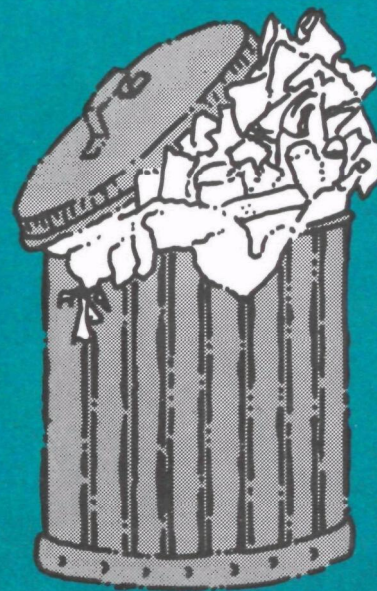
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Office of Solid Waste



The Garbage Problem:

An Action Agenda



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The Garbage Problem Defined

Each of us throws away over 1,300 pounds of garbage annually. In 1986, we Americans produced 168 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 and efficiently dispose of it has become a national garbage problem.

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

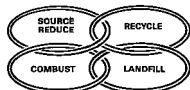
Currently almost all—80%—of this garbage is landfilled. By 1993, however, more than one-third of our landfills will be full. Very few new landfills are being built because people are alarmed about health and environmental threats landfills may cause. The same fears have limited the construction of new combustors—or 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 issued an action agenda to help form a national consensus on how we, as a nation, can deal with our growing garbage problem. The 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 help carry out the agenda. The centerpiece of the 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 to

- Reduce the toxicity and amount of waste.
- Recycle, including composting.
- Combust, with energy recovery.
- Landfill.

In integrated waste management, each of the four parts complements the others. 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 and reuse, followed by 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 identified 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 actions 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." Waste audits, reduced packaging, and the use of less toxic materials in products are called for. Also, federal procurement practices should reflect the source reduction objective.

4. **Increase recycling.** Recycling can divert a lot of waste from landfills and incinerators. To boost recycling, the Agenda for Action aims to stimulate stable markets for recyclables and compost, explore incentives, and promote buying recycled goods.
5. **Improve waste combustion safety.** Safe combustion of trash can be a useful technique for reducing waste volume and producing energy. Incineration will be made safer through operator training, plans for ash disposal, and upgraded performance standards.
6. **Improve landfill safety.** To increase landfill safety, EPA intends to require that landfill design and operating standards be met and the Agency encourages operator training. Technical assistance will help waste managers upgrade landfills. Of course, we will all need to reduce the amount of waste that needs to be landfilled.

