

It's Going in the Landfill

Most human beings aren't content to live in complete filth. Even those who don't know how to make their bed or wash the dishes will still usually take the spoiled milk out of the refrigerator after a year or two. People don't like living around trash, but they don't mind creating it. Every time a person rips into a wrapper, crumples up a piece of paper, opens a box, or throws out old clothes, trash is created. The trick is getting rid of that trash.

In the early 1900s, disposing of waste was easy. It was usually just gathered into a dumping area where pigs and vermin had a field day with it. When the trash pile got too high, it was burned. If it was more convenient, people and industries just dumped waste into a river, figuring that there was plenty of water to disperse it. After World War II, when the population in urban areas really began to soar, this haphazard waste disposal started to get a little out of hand.



The first change that had to be made was in the incineration of the trash. People began to realize that burning a pile of rubber tires wasn't the same as burning a pile of wooden logs. But there had to be some way to get rid of the waste. To solve the problem, dumping grounds were redesigned as "landfills" where trash could be compacted and stored without having to be burned. These were effective, but they also required more space, effort, and organization.

While the landfills succeeded in getting waste out of the way, they didn't completely stop it from polluting. Eventually, contaminants could seep into the drinking water, and methane gas released by the buried trash could pollute the air. To prevent this, modern landfills began to be lined with plastic to prevent seepage, and methane wells were put in to catch the gas before it escaped into the atmosphere.

The first modern landfills were created in the 1950s. In the next few decades, the old dumping grounds became obsolete due to an increased awareness of sanitation, and a little help from governmental legislation. Today, landfills are extremely common, but there is talk of another change. Instead of products being thrown away and never used again, there is a movement towards recycling. This would both decrease waste and conserve raw materials.