

11 Things You Might Not Wanna Know (But Should Know Anyway) About Trash and Landfills

You might call this disposable knowledge but we sure hope you don't.

By [Mickey Z.](#) Astoria, NY, USA | Fri Aug 07 14:00:00 GMT 2009

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tells us that (landfills are) "well-engineered facilities that are located, designed, operated, and monitored to ensure compliance with federal regulations." [The concept](#) is "to bury the

trash in such a way that it will be isolated from groundwater, will be kept dry and will not be in contact with air." After some of the recyclables are sorted out of the trash, [explains Sara Snow at TreeHugger.com](#), "the rest of the solid waste is

dumped and, at the end of the day, covered with six inches of soil. [The trash](#) is isolated from our groundwater by a synthetic bottom liner and covered daily with a layer of fresh soil." So, unlike a compost pile, trash in a [landfill](#) does not do much decomposing.

Pretty interesting stuff, huh? Well, sit tight and hold your noses because we've got (lots more fetid fun facts about garbage, trash, landfills, and other rank realities.



[Brasil2/istockphoto]

9 things you might not wanna know about trash and landfills

The average human tosses out 1500 pounds of garbage each year. That number drops to only 375 pounds of trash to the curb annually [if you compost](#). Every year, each American throws out about 1,200 pounds of organic garbage that could've been composted (hint, hint).

No one produces more trash than the U.S. (insert reality TV joke here) where 5% of the world's people [generate](#) 40% of the world's waste.

In New York City alone, [25,000 tons of municipal solid waste](#) is generated per day.

Annually, [America's landfills](#) become home to 1,600,000,000 pens, 2,000,000,000 razor blades, 220,000,000 car tires, and lots and lots of diapers.

The average baby uses [6000 diapers](#) before potty training. 49 million disposable diapers are used per day in the United States. It takes petroleum-based disposable diapers 200 to 500 years to decompose.

Decomposition times vary widely. For banana peels, it's 2-10 days. Cotton: 1-5 months. Cigarette butts: 1-10 years. Aluminum cans: 80-100 years. Glass bottles: 1,000,000 years.

If you travel Hamilton County, Ohio, you might encounter its highest point "Mount Rumpke," towering 1045 ft. above sea level. But Mount Rumpke is not a mountain mountain, it's a mountain of trash at the [Rumpke sanitary landfill](#) and one of the country's largest landfills.

Landfills **release gases**—primarily carbon dioxide and methane—but this "landfill gas" has potential as **a source of alternative energy**.

The [Fresh Kills landfill](#) on New York's Staten Island was visible from space. No wonder the extraterrestrials haven't landed yet.



Fresh Kills has been closed since 2001 and is now **being transformed into a public park**. Suggestion: if the swings are glowing, choose another activity.

There are 1,794 landfills in the U.S. and [the EPA estimates](#) they will all be full in 20 years.

Bonus list: 3 simple ways you can reduce your trash footprint:



Freecycling gives others a chance to enjoy what you no longer want or need.

Recycling turns your refuse into re-use.

Composting not only reduces trash (and hence greenhouse gases) but it can also help keep our plants healthy and growing.

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More on Landfills: Pop Quiz: What's Filling Your Landfill? Green Your Brain: How Much Landfill Trash could the USA be Composting Instead?