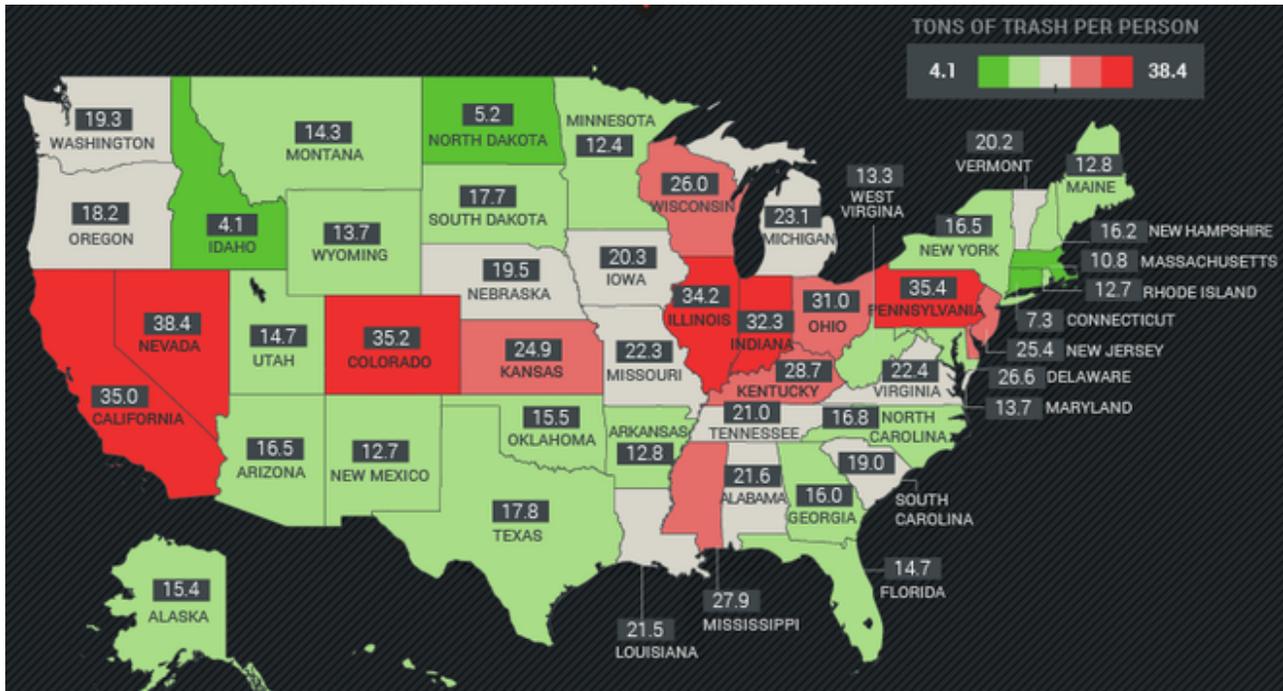


Trash by the numbers: Startling statistics about US garbage

Melissa Breyer (@MelissaBreyer), [Business](#) / [Environmental Policy](#), July 1, 2016



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The great thing about the modern sanitation system is that we don't have to live with our garbage. The bad thing about the modern sanitation system is that ... we don't have to live with our garbage. In my rebellious youth I used to (half-jokingly) assert that littering should be encouraged so that we could all see just how much garbage we make – if we were forced to live with it we'd surely make less, right? But we have good sanitation and it means that we can make more and more and more and more garbage, and it all gets magically taken away to leave room for us to make more. That's progress! (I know, I know, good sanitation is essential for quelling disease and squalor, but you get my point.)

I'm pretty sure we all understand that there's a whole lot of trash going on around here. But the numbers behind it really bring it home. To that end, SaveOnEnergy compiled a [report](#) that looks at landfills and the numbers around them. Here are some of the eye-opening statistics that made me think ... wow, littering should be encouraged! (Not really, please don't kill me in the comments.)

Anyhow, take a look.

4.4 pounds: The amount of trash generated daily, on average, by every American. Packed in cubed feet it would be the height of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

254 million tons: The amount of trash that Americans generate in a year.

22 billion: Plastic bottles thrown out yearly.

12 feet: The height of a wall from Los Angeles to New York City that could be made from tossed office paper every year.

300: Laps around the equator that could be made in paper and plastic cups, forks, and spoons disposed of annually.

2,000+: The number of active landfills in the country.

1000s: The number of inactive landfills in the country.

38.4 tons: the amount of garbage per person in Las Vegas landfills.

10 tons, or less: The amount of landfill waste per person in Idaho, North Dakota, and Connecticut.



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\$19: The cost per ton that Alabama charges to take another state's trash.

3.4 million tons: The amount of out-of-state waste taken by Ohio each year at the cost of \$35 per ton.

32 percent: The amount of Ohio's out-of-state trash that came from New York.

34.3 percent: The amount of garbage that Americans are now recycling yearly. Recycling and composting prevented 87.2 million tons of material from being disposed in 2013, up from 15 million tons in 1980.

39 million: The number of cars taken off the road to hypothetically equal the 186 million metric tons of carbon dioxide not released thanks to annual recycling. Which is awesome, and which we should strive for more of!

The report, [Land of Waste: American Landfills and Waste Production](#) also has some really interesting graphics and interactives, like a map where you can see all the data for landfills near your home and my favorite, a timelapse showing the evolution of landfills in the country over the past century.