

# THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

## A brief history of recycling

**400 BC** First municipal dump is established in ancient Athens.

**1388** The English Parliament bans dumping of waste in ditches and public waterways.

**1962** Author Rachel Carson warns of the dangers of toxic chemicals left in landfills in her book "Silent Spring."



**1970s** The first EARTH DAY introduces the concept of curbside recycling to the public, touching off a decade of progress for the environmental movement.



**1970** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is established.

– The federal Resource Recovery Act assists recycling programs and requires states to develop waste-management plans.

– Number of US landfills: about 20,000

– Percent of US waste recycled: 6.6

**1971** Oregon passes the nation's first "bottle bill" and removes about 7% of its trash from the waste stream.



**1974** University City, Mo., institutes the nation's first citywide use of curbside recycling bins, for newspapers.

**1975** More than 100 US communities have introduced curbside recycling, mostly for newspapers. More than 25% of aluminum beverage cans, the most valuable post-

Waste management is "a fundamental ecological issue. It illustrates, perhaps more clearly than any other environmental problem, that we must change many of our traditional attitudes and habits."

– William Ruckelshaus, head of the EPA (1972)

consumer product, are being recycled.

**1976** The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act sets federal standards for landfills and incinerators, including stricter disposal and cleaning requirements. Its regulations make waste disposal expensive and recycling more appealing.

**1977** Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) soda bottles introduced to replace glass bottles. ▶



"That happiness is to be attained through limitless acquisition is denied by every religion and philosophy known to humankind, but is preached incessantly by every American television set."

– Robert Bellah, "The Broken Covenant"

**1980s** Curbside recycling efforts spring up across the country, due to fears that landfill space is running out.

**1980**

– Number of US landfills: about 12,000

– Percent of US waste recycled: 9.6

**1984** The federal government requires tougher regulation of landfills.

"Nobody ever has enough." – Lewis Lapham, "Money and Class in America"

**1986** Rhode Island passes the nation's first statewide mandatory recycling laws for aluminum and steel cans, glass, newspapers, and #1 and #2 plastic.



– San Francisco meets its goal of recycling 25% of its commercial and residential waste.

◀ Fresh Kills, on Staten Island, N.Y., becomes the largest landfill in the world. The dump is, with the Great Wall of China, one of two man-made objects visible from space.



**1987** ▲ The Mobro 4000, a garbage barge out of Long Island, N.Y., sails the Atlantic Coast looking for a place to dump its cargo. Turned away by 6 states and 3 countries, it prompts concern that the US faces a landfill crisis.

**1987** The Garbage Project at the University of Arizona, Tucson, starts to excavate modern landfills as though they are ancient archaeological sites, to determine what is dumped there and how much of it biodegrades.

**1988** The EPA sets a recycling goal for the US: 25% of the country's total waste.

– The EPA estimates that since 1978, more than 14,000 landfills (or more than 70 % of those operating at that time) have closed because they were full or unsafe.

"Our economy is such that we cannot 'afford' to take care of things: labor is expensive, time is expensive, money is expensive, but materials – the stuff of creation – are so cheap that we cannot afford to take care of them."

– Wendell Berry, environmentalist

**1990s** Recycling comes under fire when supply glutts the market for recycled materials.

**1990** 140 recycling laws are enacted in 38 states and the District of Columbia

– McDonald's stops using styrofoam in its food packaging, due to consumer protests.

– Number of US landfills: 6,326

– Percent of US waste recycled: 16.2

**1991** The first major crash in the market for recyclables occurs when manufacturers' demand can't keep up with a sudden increase in recycled materials supplied by new curbside programs.



**1993** President Clinton orders all federal agencies to buy printing and writing paper made of at least 30% recycled materials by the end of 1998. ▲

**1995** Nationwide, the recycling rate reaches 26%, topping the EPA's 25% goal.

– The Chicago Board of Trade sets up an electronic listing for recycled paper, glass, and plastic to link buyers and sellers of these materials.

**1996** Newsprint prices fall so low that some recycling contractors dump collected paper in landfills.



**1997** The growth of curbside recycling slows, because most programs have enough of the materials that are in demand by manufacturers.

**1999** Number of US landfills: 2,216

– Percent of US waste recycled: 28.1

**2000s** Recycling of many materials appears to have plateaued, while the amount of per-capita trash produced in the US continues to climb steadily.

"We go with what the public mind is – we research what they're thinking – and they do not seem to think the recycling of plastic is as important as it was 10 years ago...." – Rob Krebs, American Plastics Council

**2000** The number of single-serving plastic beverage bottles on store shelves hits 18 billion.

**2002** New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposes saving the city \$57 million by cutting all metal, glass, and plastic recycling service.