

Why your stuff consumption matters



- Stuff includes everyday items that we use and sooner or later throw away such as clothing, furniture, newspapers, appliances, batteries, product packaging, plastic bottles and bags, etc.
- Most of the things we consume will end up in the trash. A majority of this trash ends up being spread around the globe by wind, water, or humans[1].
- Trash that ends up in the water builds up as massive garbage patches in the world's oceans. Marine animals, such as turtles, whales, or seals can be harmed by trash accumulating in the oceans[1].
- Dangerous chemicals can leak out of trash that is buried in landfills, polluting the surrounding water and soil.
- A lot of trash is burned around the globe. Burning trash causes air pollution and is the world's largest source of dioxins, which are some of the most toxic chemicals known to science[3].
- Some trash, especially plastics, takes a very long time to break down. This leads to huge piles of garbage in the environment.
- Throwing stuff away instead of re-using it means we also waste the energy and resources that were used to make these items[2].

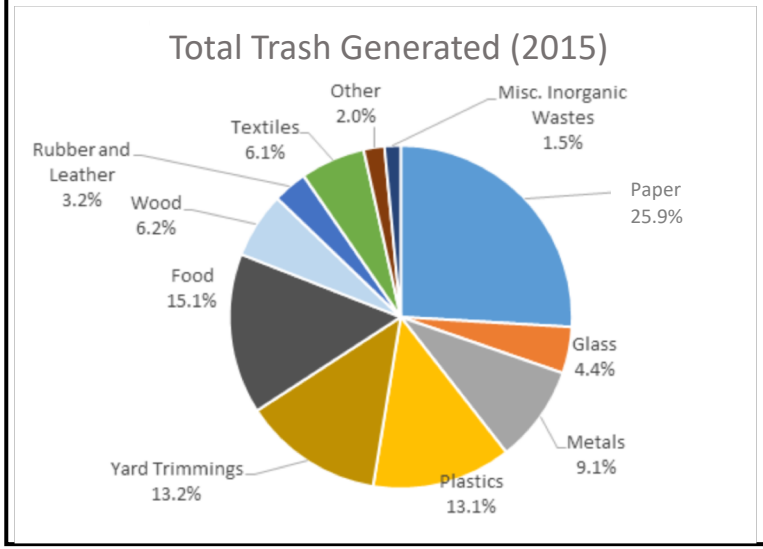
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[1] https://greenlivingideas.com/2015/04/24/how-our-trash-affects-the-whole-planet/

[2] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/when-will-we-hit-peak-garbage-7074398/

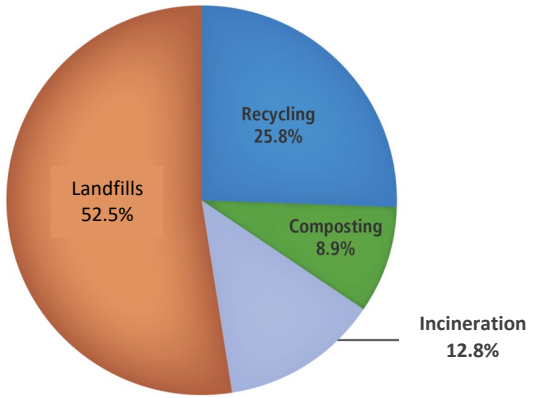
[3] http://www.theworldcounts.com/counters/waste_pollution_facts/household_waste_statistics

Data on stuff consumption and waste[1]



- An average American produces about 4.5 pounds of trash per day[1].
- In the U.S., the total generation of trash in 2015 was 262.4 million tons.
- Most of this trash is paper, yard trimmings, food, and plastic products such as plastic bottles or product packaging.

- More than half of our trash ends up in landfills. Food (22%), plastics (18.9%), paper (13.3%), metals (9.5%), and clothing (7.6%) make up most of the landfill waste.
- Most of the recycled waste includes paper (67%) and metals (12%).
- Some trash is burned (incinerated) and used to make electricity.



[1] https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials



Measuring your consumption of stuff



Consumption

Consuming means buying stuff. This also includes stuff your parents or other adults buy for you. One way to measure how much stuff you consume is to keep track of the things you buy over a certain amount of time. This includes things you use once like plastic bottles or paper cups, and things you use for a longer time like clothes, furniture, or electronics.

Waste

Another way to measure your consumption is to keep track of how much stuff you throw away. This includes *everything* that you throw away, even if it goes in the recycling or compost.

Use one (or both) of these methods to measure your consumption of stuff. You can keep track of how many and what type of things you buy. You can try to count everything you throw away, but it might be easier to measure total amounts (for example, by weighing a recycling bin, or counting the number of trash bags).