

# Intro to Trash

## *Background*

People settling into towns a very long time ago had a waste problem. Not only were there problems with sewage (toilets), there were also problems with the solid waste people created (garbage).

By 500 BC, municipal waste was becoming a problem. It smelled bad, it looked bad, it was a slip and fall hazard, and it spread disease. Think of the bacteria it takes to decompose trash, the flies, maggots, methane gas, sloppy and murky water, and the scavenging animals that feast on garbage. In those days, most of the waste was food scraps, broken dishes, dish and bath water, metal, and old cloth all mixed in with each other. It is a wonder humans survived the move to urban living.

From the video you just viewed, you learned: “The first municipal dump was established in ancient Athens in 400 BC. An edict was issued against throwing garbage in the streets, and waste was required to be disposed no less than one mile away from the city walls.” Did you know the Romans had the first garbage men in 200 AD? They would walk through the streets in two-man teams, picking up garbage and placing it in a wagon.

The “hell” written about in the bible was a garbage dump outside of the city of Jerusalem that caught on fire spontaneously from the methane gas build-up. If a person was in poor favor with the politicians of the day, they were sent to the garbage dump to perish. The dump was also used for disposal of bodies and evidence. It was in this same vein of horror and fear that Santa Anna set fire to the Alamo with the dead heroes’ bodies inside.

In 1388, the English Parliament barred waste disposal in public waterways and ditches. Two decades later Paris, France declared the high garbage piles outside the city gates an interference to the city’s defense because the French could not see over the trash piles.

The first paper mill in the United States, the Rittenhouse Mill, was built in Philadelphia, Pa. The paper was made from recycled rags and used cloth paper. Paper was not made from trees for another 177 years. As the industrial revolution roared through much of the world, so did the rubbish problems. Trash was piled away from cities, burned, compacted, used to fill in wetlands, sent out to sea, etc. By the late 1880s, public alarm arose because we were running out of places to store refuse and towns were growing out to the landfills. Our trash composition has changed 100 years later, but little has changed in how we deal with it. We just stack it higher, compact it tighter, burn it, and recycle it. We rarely work to reduce how much trash we create.