



The Secret Life of Garbage:
What Happens When We Throw It Away.

Nat'l Ass'n of Active & Retired Federal Employees

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October 20, 2025**

Agenda

- **Introduction**
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INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO MY TRASH?

IF MY TRASH GETS “TAKEN AWAY,” I DON’T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT AGAIN.



But guess what! There’s no such thing as “away.” Every piece of trash has to go “somewhere.”

I'm hopeful that by sharing with you some things I've learned over the last six months, you might be willing to make some small lifestyle changes in order to make a more livable world for you, me, our kids and grandkids. Bamboo TP?

What is meant by “livable?”

For one thing, I would like to stop ingesting (eating) micro- and –nano plastics which are now detected in every human being, animal, sea creatures, even newborn babies (breast milk), in root vegetables like potatoes and carrots, and even in rain water.



What's happening globally?

The story of Izzettin Akman, a Kurdish farmer in Adana, Turkey

Turkey Case: In 2016, Kurdish farmer Izzettin Akman discovered a truck dumping burning trash near his citrus farm in Adana. The fire caused long-term environmental damage, killing pollinating bees and contaminating the irrigation system with microplastics, which harmed his orange and lemon trees. This incident highlighted the larger issue of organized international waste dumping.

Turkey has become a dumping ground for foreign waste, despite a 2017 government initiative led by first lady Emine Erdoğan's program calling for Zero Waste and better waste management.



Turkey is the largest destination for waste exported from the EU.



The US has exported its waste to many countries such as Guatemala and other developing countries, and various islands.



Guatemala Case: Puerto Barrios, a port built by the United Fruit Company in the early 20th century to export bananas to the U.S., while exploiting Guatemala's resources and labor. In 1992, plans emerged to construct another port, Las Escobas, to import toxic sewage sludge from U.S. cities. The project was canceled after a whistleblower exposed corruption at the highest levels of Guatemala's government, but not before local communities were displaced.

Global Waste Trade: The book *Waste Wars* (copyright 2025) exposes the dangers of chemical pollution. While the U.S. passed laws to regulate toxic substances, companies exploited weaker regulations in poorer countries, exporting banned chemicals and waste. The Colbert brothers, two New Jersey businessmen, profited from selling hazardous materials to developing nations, often with funding from U.S. agencies and the World Bank. This practice exemplifies the unequal power dynamics and environmental harm caused by the global waste trade.

When we export our plastic, it might be out of sight and out of mind for us, but it's harming people and nature in other countries.

The Government must ban plastic waste exports as a matter of urgency to stop this environmental colonialism.

Experts have claimed nearly **one million tons of plastic** are being 'openly dumped' in Turkey each year.



The biggest export of the U.S. to China was exporting our waste to China. Since the early 1990s, China had been the recipient of half of ALL the plastic placed into recycling bins anywhere on Earth. Your discarded trash...those water bottles and Styrofoam egg cartons, were often transported aboard cargo container ships that had first crossed the Pacific loaded with cheap consumer goods—dog toys, key chains, selfie sticks—before returning to China packed with the plastic and paper in which those goods had been packaged.

By the early 2000s, America's biggest export to China was the stuff Americans tossed away, and at least the same amount was being jettisoned from the European Union countries to China.

Then China started making stricter regulations about what kinds of trash they would accept...only "clean" plastics (no food residue, etc.). And in 2017, China announced that it would no longer accept any foreign waste.

That is still the case today.

Large container ships' length is often compared to 4 football fields.

Cruise ships are often said to equal or exceed the size of an 18 story building.



At the end of their life, what do you think happens to these ships? Teams of low-paid laborers remove any valuable components (mostly steel to be melted and re-used). Shipbreaking is considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, due to the amount of toxic materials which must be removed (asbestos, mercury, lead, oil residues, and PCBs). **LANDFILLS GET THE RESIDUAL MATERIALS.**

Pleasure boats/yachts?



Larry Ellison

Jeff Bezos





Beyond shipbreaking and residual materials ending up in landfills, superyachts are a high-polluting mode of transportation. According to *The Guardian*, Roman Abramovich's yachts alone release over 22,000 metric tons of carbon annually, "which is more than some small countries."

Roman Abramovich (59) is a Russian business oligarch and politician. He is the former owner of Chelsea, a Premier League football club in London, England, and is the primary owner of the private investment company Millhouse. He has Russian, Portuguese and Israeli citizenship.

Personal fishing boats...what happens to these at end-of-life or no longer wanted? And cars? And construction demolition? No wonder landfills are filling up faster than projected.



LOCAL CONCERNS

Microplastics are tiny pieces of plastic, smaller than a pencil eraser, that are found everywhere in the environment. They come from two main sources: large plastic items breaking down over time (like bottles and bags) or being made intentionally small for products like some cosmetics. These tiny plastics can end up in our food, water, and even the air, and while the long-term health effects are still being studied, it's important to reduce exposure where possible.





Nano-plastics are extremely tiny pieces of plastic (smaller than a spec of dust), even smaller than microplastics, that are so small you can't see them without a special microscope. They form when bigger pieces of plastic, like a plastic bottle or bag, break down into smaller and smaller parts. Because they are so tiny, they can get into places in nature and in our bodies that bigger plastic pieces can't.

Nanoplastics are plastic particles 100 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair, and they are polluting our environment and our food, to the extent that they are now being found in human blood, lungs, placenta, and breast milk.

A 2024 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that more than half of patients had micro- or nano- plastics in their carotid arteries, and calculated that these patients had a risk of heart attack, stroke or death that was about 4.5 times higher than those who didn't.

California has a ban on single-use plastic bags, which is evolving with a new law taking effect on January 1, 2026, that will completely eliminate thin plastic checkout bags at most retail stores. The state originally banned plastic bags in 2014 but allowed thicker, so-called "reusable" plastic bags, which created a new source of waste. The new legislation bans these as well, and stores will now only be allowed to offer recycled paper or compostable bags for a fee.

Avoid the **bag fee** (minimum of ten cents each) by bringing your own reusable bags or simply hand-carrying your purchases. (Aldi). Walmart curbside also has an option when you order online to choose "I don't want my groceries in bags."

Silver Creek Materials (Tarrant County, SW side of Lake Worth)

Transforming Mud Water Waste Into Resources

“We understand the unique challenges and business costs associated with managing **drilling mud**. Whether you’re in dredging, horizontal drilling, hydro-excavating, or any other industry that generates mud water, we’re here to make your life easier. Through our recycling process, we transform recovered material into high-quality topsoil—turning disposal problem into a sustainable solution.”



What happened in Johnson County

Farmers Tony and Karen Coleman and James and Robin Farmer are at the center of the legal battle.

Their land became contaminated when a neighbor received biosolids from a Fort Worth-contracted fertilizer company and left the fertilizer in piles.

Heavy rains washed the material and its associated toxins onto the nearby properties, where it entered the soil and shallow groundwater.

In addition to sick animals, investigators found high levels of PFAS in the soil and water.



DO	DON'T
Put plastic water bottles in the recycle bin (with caps lightly screwed on)	No bottle caps or lids not attached to the larger items
No black plastic (frozen meals, black plastic bags). Laser can't read black / identify the item so gets sent to the landfill and we're paying Republic to handle it.	Try to not buy anything made of black plastic. Choose items with a different color.
No batteries or light bulbs. Lithium battery started a fire at the Plano recycle center and turned it to the ground.	Take to retailers who have a process for handling: Best Buy, Home Depot, Staples, Ace Hardware, Lowes
No Electronics waste aka e-waste.	Take to the Arlington landfill (they have a special section set aside for e-waste. Be sure to clear any personal info from your device before taking it. Or utilize one of the occasional "electronic waste Saturdays where you can take your Stuff to UTA.

DO	DON'T
No single use plastic bags from the grocery store. Take them to a store drop off location at Walmart, Kroger, Target.	These can wrap around automated equipment and shut down the Materials Recovery Facility.
No liquids or food waste in recycle bin.	We pay Republic to sort these out and send to landfill, so they should go in the trash bin (not recycle bin) for direct transport to the landfill.
No yard waste, grass clippings, branches	A third truck comes by my house on trash days to pick up bulk items and/or yard waste.
Large appliances and large furniture pieces which can't be donated.	Arlington residents can call Republic Services to schedule a bulk pickup at no additional charge. If furniture is still in "okay" shape, consider donating it to Mission Arlington or Donate2Impact, both organizations will pick up large items.
No clothing.	Donate it instead or put in garbage if necessary. Or use for rags.

Tarrant County Landfills

Republic Services Arlington Landfill, 800 Mosier Valley Rd, Euless, TX 76040

Republic Services North Texas Landfill, 6200 Elliott Reeder Rd, F.W. 76117

Republic Services F.W. SE Landfill. 6288 Salt Rd, Forest Hill, TX 76140. By Kennedale.

Note: I didn't know that Republic Services provides 24/7 Emergency & Hazmat spills.

C&D Landfill (Construction and Demolition). 4144 Dick Price Rd, Fort Worth, TX 76140. Operated by Waste Connections. "We provide non-hazardous recycling and landfill disposal services to commercial, industrial, municipal and residential customers. Our landfill accepts municipal solid waste (MSW), **special waste (?)**, and materials involving solidification.

Arlington Landfill, 800 Mosier Valley Road (off of north Collins)



Falconer at Arlington Landfill



Photos from Arlington Landfill website.



Photos from Arlington Landfill website.



Final tips & takeaways

REMEMBER THE 7 R's:

1. Refuse
2. Reduce
3. Reuse
4. Repurpose
5. Repair
6. Recycle
7. Rot

REFUSE

Refuse to fall for the marketing tactics that tell you to buy more when you don't need to.

REDUCE

You don't have to become a total "minimalist" but you know we can all get by with "less." We need to consume less.

This is the best way to reduce your exposure to microplastics.

REUSE

Example: Wash out use Ziploc bags and use them again and again instead of always picking a brand new one.

Reuse glass Mason jars for cold drinks instead of buying new plastic glasses.

REPURPOSE

Example: Egg cartons for starting seedlings.

Cut worn bed sheets into rags and use them to wash the car or mop the floor.

REPAIR

California passed the “right to repair” law. Texas should pass it also.

When given a choice, always buy a repairable item and avoid items where the manufacturer makes it difficult or impossible to upgrade or repair it.

Example: Pixel cell phones. Consumer can easily insert a new battery and replace a broken screen. Vs Apple and Galaxy which makes phones that it's difficult or impossible to change these components.

RECYCLE

Be informed about local recycling—what to put in the recycle bin and what goes in the trash bin.

ROT

To save the planet, we want to use things that rot. Yes, food, but not only food. We want compostable plastics, some of which are available now but cost more.

For a green burial, use just a shroud or plain wood casket instead of metal.

Hopefully, scientists are working hard to give us more options!

**“There is no such thing
as ‘away.’ So, when we
throw anything away, it
must go somewhere.”
– Annie Leonard**



SOURCES:

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The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, our Communities, and our Health—and a Vision for Change, Annie Leonard (c) 2010

National Academies, “Municipal Solid Waste Recycling in the United States,” 2025

Texas Climate News, article “Texas’ shoreline is swamped by plastic trash—the most of any state.” 2018

Various internet sources

Let's clean up our Earth and keep it that way.

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