What a Waste 2.0: Everything You Should Know About Solid Waste Management

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CSm4GG2VrU> [World Bank](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE9mrcoX-oE-2f1BL-iPPoQ)

Published on Sep 20, 2018

*Transcript*

Solid waste management is a universal issue that affects every single person in the world. As you can see in our new report, “What a Waste 2.0”, if we don't manage waste properly, it can harm our health our environment and even our prosperity. Poorly managed waste is contaminating the world's oceans, clogging drains and causing flooding, transmitting diseases, increasing respiratory problems from burning, harming animals that consume waste unknowingly, and affecting economic development such as through tourism. Without urgent action these issues will only get worse.

Here's what everyone should know.

First, rapid urbanization, population growth, and economic development will push global waste generation to increase by 70 percent over the next 30 years. Each year the world generates more than 2 billion metric tons of municipal solid waste. Without urgent action, this will increase by nearly 3/4 to 3.4 billion tons over the next 30 years. East Asia currently generates about 1/4 of the world's waste, while waste generation is growing the fastest in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. While high-income countries account only for 16% of the global population, they generate over one-third of the world's waste.

Second, in low-income countries over 90% of waste is mismanaged. It is either openly dumped or burned. Upper, middle, and high-income countries provide nearly universal waste collection. In high-income countries, more than 1/3 of waste is recovered through recycling and composting. Low-income countries only collect about half of the waste in cities. and only about one-quarter in rural areas. There is much to be done in collecting waste in low-income countries.

Third, plastics are a profoundly difficult and complex problem. In 2016, the world generated a whopping 242 million metric tons of plastic waste. We could make about 24 trillion plastic bottles out of it, and their water volume could fill up to four point eight million Olympic sized swimming pools. Even when plastic waste is collected, many countries don't have the capacity to process the waste, leading to dumping or mismanagement of it. Plastics in rivers waterways and oceans are a particularly growing, urgent problem. 90% of marine debris is plastic.

Waste is growing, but so too is the global momentum to find solutions to extend the tide and make waste management more sustainable. Many solutions already exist. The World Bank is increasingly working with developing countries worldwide to invest in sustainable waste management and address challenges related to infrastructure, governance, financing and capacity. For example, there are different ways to curb plastic waste: by producing less, consuming less, and including plastic in overall waste management.

Solid waste data and planning are also part of the solution. It is important to understand how much and what types of waste are generated and where. This can help governments create more effective waste management policies and plans for the local context. Waste management can be costly. It may be the single highest budget item for many local governments; however, it makes economic sense to manage properly. Uncollected waste and poorly disposed waste have significant health and environmental impacts. The cost of addressing these impacts is many times higher than the cost of developing and operating simple adequate waste management systems.

In an era of rapid urbanization and population growth, solid waste management is a critical piece for sustainable, healthy, and inclusive cities and communities. However, it is often put on the back burner when it comes to overall development. If no action is taken, we will push ourselves and our children to live in a world with more waste and overwhelming pollution. Lives, livelihoods and environment would pay an even higher price than they are already.

We already know what needs to be done to reverse that trend. We just need all levels of society to take urgent action. Sustainable waste management is everyone's business. The time for action is now.