



Waste



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Photo du buste de M. Poubelle, p. 5 : Denys Puech / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)

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Nous reconnaissons l'aide financière du gouvernement du Canada.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.
We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Nous tenons également à remercier la SODEC pour son appui financier.
Gouvernement du Québec—Programme de crédit d'impôt pour l'édition de livres—Gestion SODEC.

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Catalogage avant publication de Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec et Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Titre: Les déchets.

Autres titres: Déchets (2020)

Description: Mention de collection: Savoir. L'environnement

Identifiants: Canadiana (livre imprimé) 20200080938 | Canadiana (livre numérique) 20200080946 | ISBN 9782764440766 | ISBN 9782764442067 (PDF)

Vedettes-matière: RVM: Déchets—Ouvrages pour la jeunesse.

Classification: LCC TD792.D43 2020 | CDD j363.72/8—dc23

Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2020

Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque et Archives du Canada, 2020

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quebec-amerique.com

Imprimé au Canada

Collection:



THE ENVIRONMENT includes the Earth's naturally occurring elements: air, water, soil, plants and animals. As humans, that includes us!

WASTE is anything we no longer need or wish to get rid of. As the world's population increases, so does the production of waste. Waste items can be dangerous for our environment.

But what actually counts as waste?

And what can we do to protect our environment?



Every word you see in **green** is defined in the glossary on the last page!

What is *waste*?

Waste consists of all the **leftover** items that humans produce and use, then **no longer need**: a banana peel, an empty bag of chips, a shoe with a hole in it, a broken computer, **EVERYTHING!**

A bit of history

Humans have always produced waste. At first, waste like food scraps naturally **decomposed** in the soil.

Little by little, humans began building tools, houses and cities. Their waste multiplied and was left **EVERYWHERE**.

In the 18th century, factories appeared. Humans could produce items faster than before and in greater quantities, which led to even more waste!



A brilliant idea

In the 19th century, people still had a bad habit of throwing their **waste** directly in the street. At times, they even tossed it out the window without looking to see if anyone was passing by.

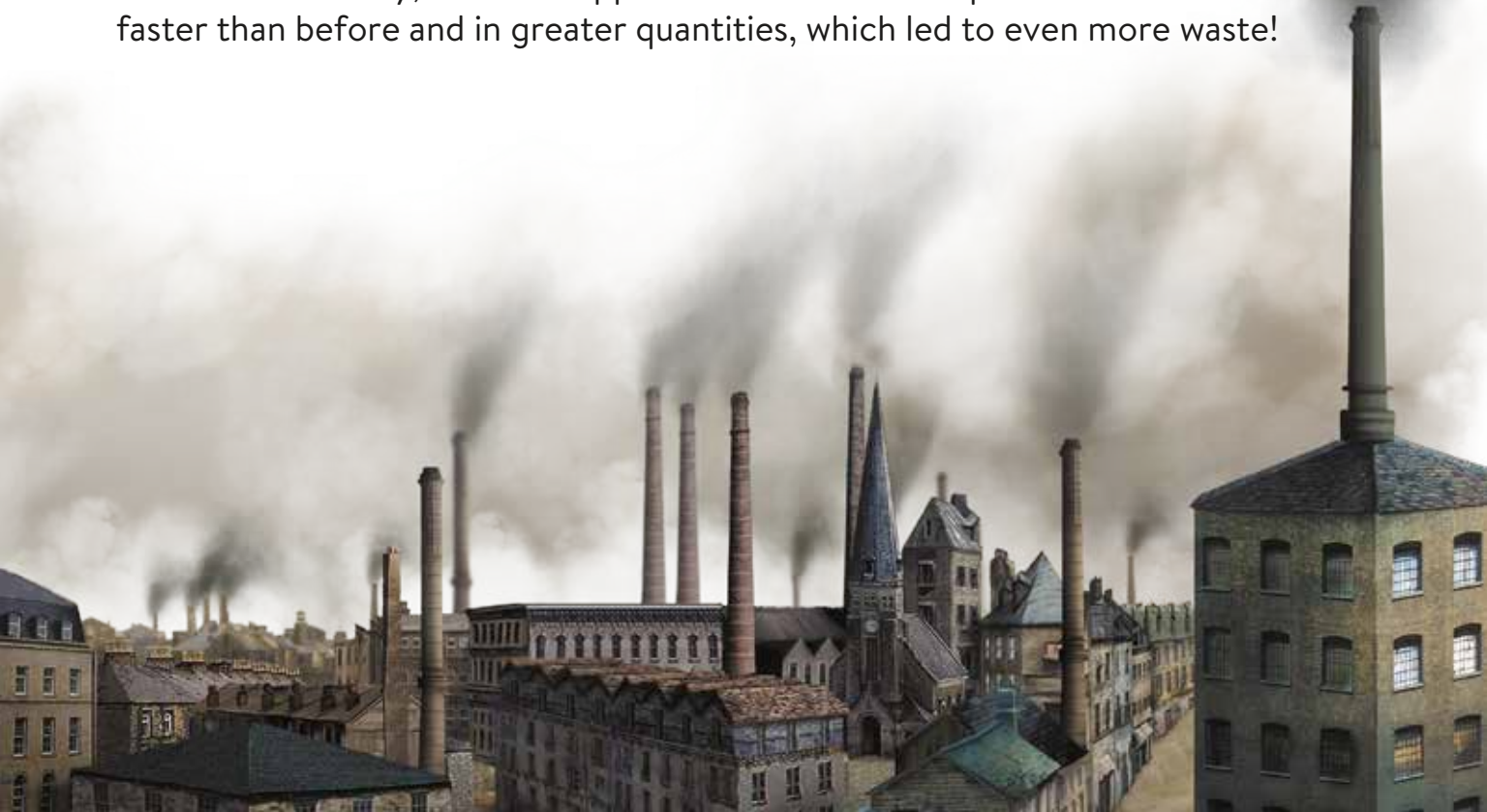
Disgusted by the streets of Paris, **Eugène Poubelle** introduced an 1883 **law** requiring city residents to put their garbage in covered containers. As a result, **ragpickers** lost their livelihood.

Residents were not happy about the new law. They decided to call the containers “**poubelles**” to make fun of Eugène. The word became so popular that it was added to the French dictionary to refer to trash bins.

Although the idea of a trash bin was not welcomed at first, today they are found everywhere—and everyone is happy to have clean streets!



At one time, picking rags was a trade. **Ragpickers** walked around the city collecting rags, glass, cans and other items and sold them to factories.



France

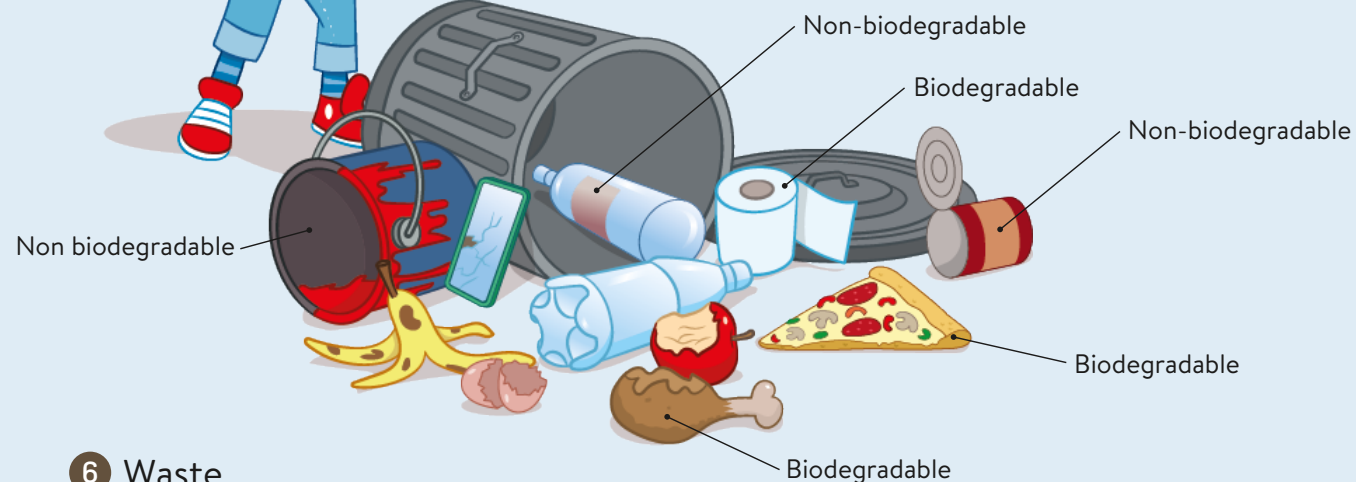
Eugène Poubelle

What's in a trash bin?

Today, **trash bins** are a part of our daily lives. Even a child knows that a plastic **bottle** will not magically **disappear** if it is thrown on the ground. Plastic bottles are **non-biodegradable waste**, meaning they do not naturally **decompose**. **Biodegradable** waste, like a banana peel, will naturally decompose over time.



"Bio" means "natural" and "degradable" means "that which breaks down". Therefore, "biodegradable" means "that which breaks down naturally", without any human intervention necessary. However, that doesn't mean you should throw biodegradable waste on the ground – after all, it's not magic!



Reduce–Reuse–Recycle–Recover

Before **buying** or **throwing** anything away, think about these four options first.

Reduce: Do I really need new clothes? No? By not buying any, I reduce my expenses as well as things that may end up cluttering my house.

Reuse: Is it still good? When it's time to go back to school I go through all my supplies to see what I can reuse. It's still good, but I don't want it anymore. I check to see whether someone else could reuse the things I no longer need. For example, I can donate clothes I've outgrown. I can also trade a book or a game with someone else.

Recycle: Do I throw out items that cannot be reused, donated or traded? Not so fast! I check to see whether they can go into the recycling bin first.

Recover: Once I've reduced, reused and recycled, I can still recover. Recovery involves waste that cannot be recycled, but that can still be transformed in other ways. For example, food scraps can be put aside and turned into **compost** (to fertilize soil).



When we put trash in a bin, where does it go?

There are two ways to **dispose of** waste that cannot be recycled or composted.

It is burned in **incinerators**.



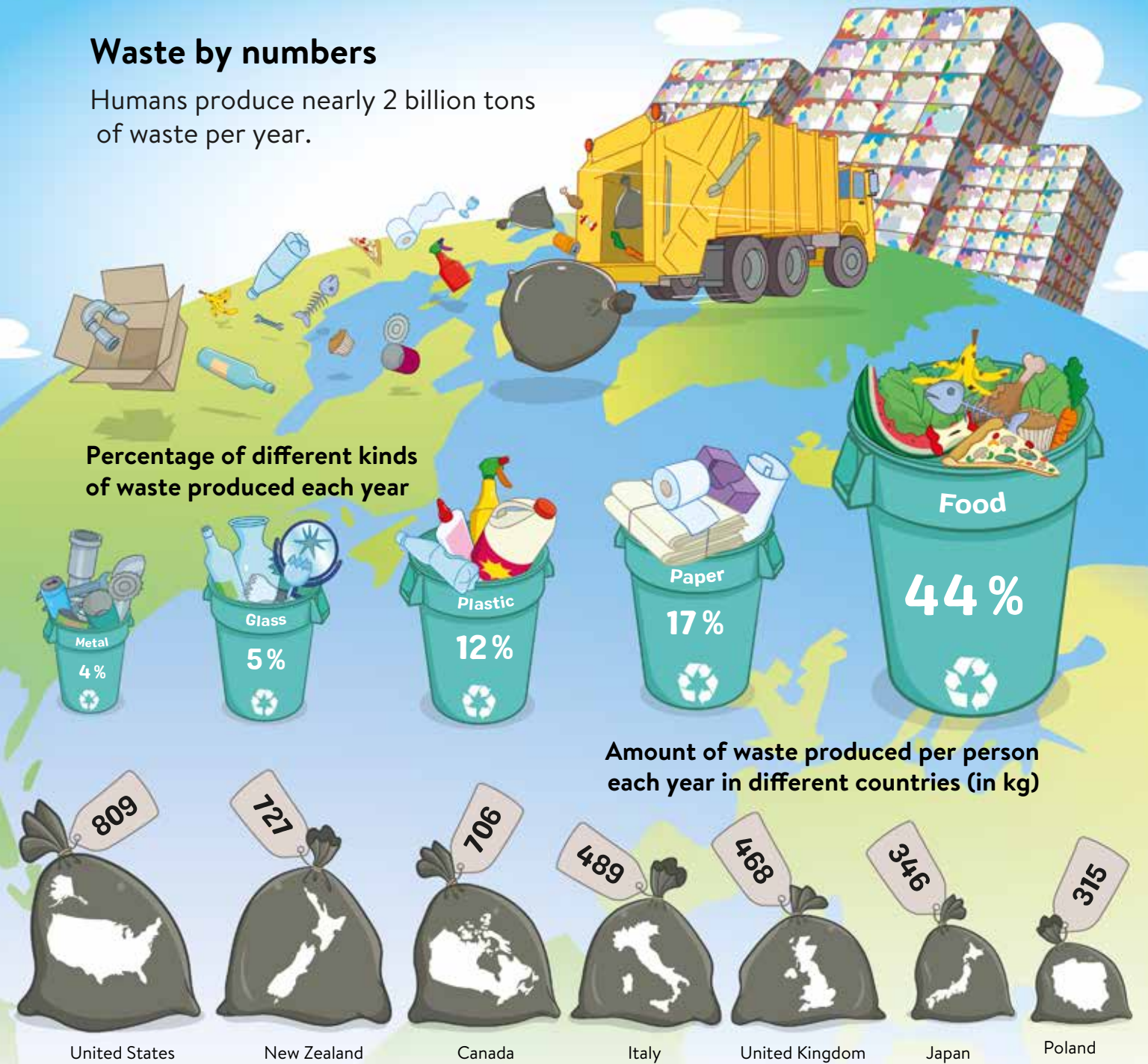
or

It is sent to a **landfill**.



Waste by numbers

Humans produce nearly 2 billion tons of waste per year.



What are some other ways to dispose of waste?

Recycling lets us make new objects using the raw materials from old ones.

Composting transforms **organic** waste, such as food scraps, into **compost**.

Before turning the page, can you spot the items that can be recycled and composted in the picture?

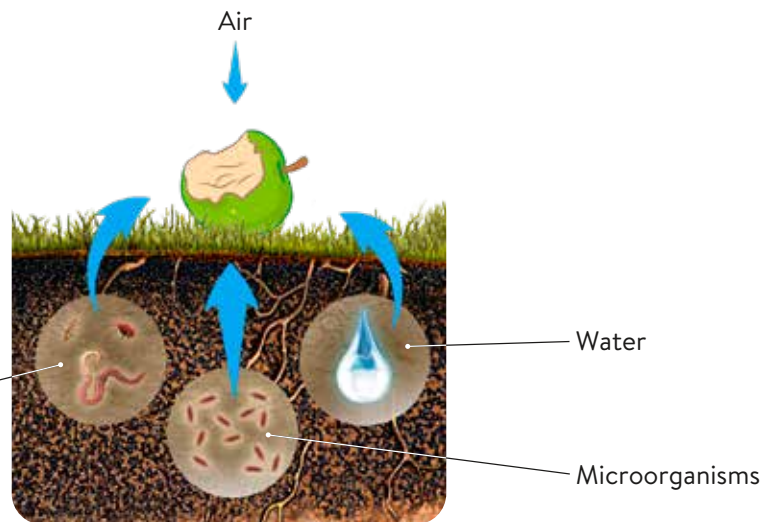


Answers on page 30.

What is *compost*?

Compost reduces the amount of **waste** we throw away. Composting helps repurpose food scraps, along with all other **biodegradable** materials in our house. Take used tissues, for example. Instead of throwing them in the trash, we can put them in something called a “compost bin”. This bin can be kept at home, in the backyard. Some countries even collect **compost** – they send around a truck to empty the bins.

Composting happens the same way, whether it’s through a collection service, in your backyard or out in nature. Biodegradable materials are **decomposed** (slowly broken down into dirt) with help from **air, water** and living things like **insects, worms** and **microorganisms**. These are so small that you need a microscope to see them.



Why compost?

The advantage of **composting** is that it helps **reduce** the amount of **waste** that ends up in landfills and incinerators. It also creates **compost**. This **rich soil** is used to fertilize plants, whether on the farm, in your backyard or in your vegetable garden.

And there’s more! When waste **decomposes**, it produces heat. With this heat, we can create electricity.



1. Food scraps
2. Compost

At home, 1 out of every 3 items to be thrown out can be put in the compost.

In North America, 1 person produces approximately 105 kg of compostable waste each year. That’s about 250 pizzas!

If it was turned into electricity, this same amount of waste (105 kg) could power a 100-watt light bulb for 2 weeks.

