

A Timeline of Solid Waste Management in New York City

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1881 – The New York City Department of Street Cleaning (now called the Department of Sanitation) is formed. This department was tasked with taking over the responsibility of waste collection and street cleaning previously held by the Police Department.

(NYCWasteless – History)

1885 – America's first incinerator is built on Governor's Island. Throughout the next century, incinerators would be the main source of waste management in New York City, burning almost 1/3 of the city's trash. (Martin)

1895 – George Waring became the Commissioner of the Department of Street Cleaning (now Dept. of Sanitation) and put into action a waste management plan that made ocean dumping illegal and mandated recycling efforts. Prior to Waring, 75% of New York City's waste was dumped into the Atlantic Ocean. As part of Waring's initiative, household waste was separated into three distinct categories and dealt with accordingly:

(a) **Food Waste** was steamed and compressed to produce grease and fertilizer;
(b) **Rubbish** from which paper and other materials were recovered; and (c) **Ash**, which was landfilled along with nonmarketable rubbish. This becomes New York City's first recycling program. (NYCWasteless – History)

1905 – In a revolutionary step in waste-to-energy, New York City began using a garbage incinerator to generate electricity and light the Williamsburg Bridge. (History)

1918 – Labor and materials shortages as a result of World War I led to a halt in New York's recycling programs, as the Federal Government started the Waste Reclamation Service. During the next couple decades, the Department of Sanitation built and operated 22 incinerators and 89 landfills. (NYCWasteless – History)

Early 1930's – The first mass-production trash collection trucks with built-in compactors are introduced, increasing vehicle capacity and efficiency while also allowing for easier waste transportation to more distant areas. (Rotten)

1934 – After communities in New Jersey obtain a court order to stop New York from dumping waste into the Atlantic Ocean, the Supreme Court upholds this action, but only as it applies to municipal (public) waste, not commercial or industrial. (Rotten)

1947 – The Fresh Kills Landfill is opened in Staten Island. Originally meant to be a temporary solution, it covered over 2000 acres of land and at one point was the largest landfill in the world. (Miller)

1965 – The Solid Waste Disposal Act is enacted, becoming the first federal solid waste management law. The act's focus is to promote and provide assistance in research and development for improved waste management techniques. (Rotten)

1970 – The Federal Resource Recovery Act amends the Solid Waste Disposal Act, shifting its focus from disposal to recycling and reuse of recoverable and organic materials in solid waste and the conversion of waste to energy. (History)

1970 – The Federal Clean Air act is enacted, leading to incinerator shutdowns because they did not meet new emission guidelines. (Rotten)

1970 – The United States Environmental Protection Agency is established by President Nixon, with a goal to “protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment”. National waste management issues fall under their responsibility. (EPA)

1978 – After it's review of the Philadelphia vs. New Jersey case, in which New Jersey refused to accept waste from Philadelphia, the Supreme Court ruled that waste is protected by the Interstate Commerce Clause and therefore one state cannot ban shipments of waste from another. This was an important ruling for New York City's waste management policies, considering that to this day we still ship our waste across state lines. (Rotten)

1979 – The EPA issued guidelines making open dumping in landfills illegal. (History)

1987 – The Mobro 4000, a barge from Long Island carrying 6,000 tons of garbage is rejected by six different states and 3 countries (US, Belize and Mexico). After 173 days, it is incinerated in Brooklyn, New York and the ash brought to a landfill in Long Island, but extensive media coverage of this incident made it a symbol for limited landfill capacity, especially in the New York area. (History)

1989 – Archaeologist William Rathje discovers 18-year old corn on the cob that is still intact in an Arizona landfill, confirming the lack of biodegradation in some types of landfills (History)

1994 – New York City's last municipal incinerator closes amid EPA emission standards and growing pollution concerns. (Rotten)

Late 1990's – Only remaining New York City landfill in operation was Fresh Kills, where all of the city's disposable waste went via barges from a network of marine transfer stations run by the city (PlaNYC)

1999 – New York City's last waste incinerator is torn down, marking the end of an era of incineration as a way of managing waste in New York City (Martin)

2001 – Fresh Kills, the last remaining landfill in New York City was closed. This was the first time that New York City had no place within the five boroughs to bury or burn it's garbage. The city began sending most of its waste to private transfer stations in

neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens the Bronx to be exported, and recycling or composting the rest. (Martin)

2006 – New York City adopts the long-term Solid Waste Management Plan aimed at developing less hazardous, cheaper approaches to exporting New York City’s garbage. The SWMP also hopes to minimize the impacts of this waste management system on over-burdened outer-borough neighborhoods by establishing transfer stations for residential wastesheds in every borough and reduce traffic congestion and air pollution by increasing the use of rail and barge transport as a means of exporting the city’s waste instead of trucking it thousands of miles. (PlaNYC)

2007 – Mayor Bloomberg releases the comprehensive PlaNYC, a sustainability effort looking ahead to 2030 and aimed at preparing New York City for future population growth, climate change, etc. The plan includes a detailed section on solid waste managements with a number of initiatives that include targeting recycling incentives, creating opportunities to recover organic materials from waste, with goals of increasing diversion from landfills by 75%, reducing GHG emissions by 1 million metric tons, and improve the overall efficiency of New York City’s waste management system. (PlaNYC)

2010 – New York City, in partnership with Sims Metal Management announced the inception of a new recycling facility to be built at the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal in Sunset Park, Brooklyn that will include processing and storing buildings and reduce our reliance on vehicle waste transportation by using barges at the Marine Terminal. The city has invested over \$48 million into the project. (PlaNYC)

2012 – As of January 2012, 32% of New York City’s waste is transported out of the city via rail, 23% by Department of Sanitation collection truck, and 45% by long-haul truck. Once the 2006 SWMP takes effect, New York City estimates that 41% of garbage will be exported by rail, 12% by collection truck and 47% by barge. (Cohen)

2013 – Construction on the recycling facility in South Brooklyn is expected to be completed and the facility operational by June 2013. (NYCWasteless – Material)

2017 – By this year, Mayor Michael Bloomberg says he hopes to have doubled residential and institutional waste diversion from landfills from 15% to 30%. (Cohen)

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