

New york city



How many times have we traveled to New York or any other city and compared its sights and sounds to our own cities past and present history? If I had to guess, I would say countless. If anyone has ever been or is planning to travel to New York, the first eye sore that you'll notice is the amount of trash and garbage on the streets. A big problem has been what to do with all of the trash that just seemingly blows or sits around without being picked up.

As you walk thru the streets of Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, you will see mountains of trash bags in front of homes and business establishments. Not an eye catching site for such a big city with a storied past like New York. But how did New York encounter such a problem? The garbage issue has been in existence since “ the first Dutch settlers arrived in what would become New York back in the 1680's. At that time, “ Seventy-Five percent of New York City's waste was dumped into the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1895, then Commissioner George Waring instituted a waste management plan that eliminated ocean dumping and mandated recycling. He devised a plan for the recycled garbage (notably household garbage) to be separated into three categories: food waste, which was steamed and compressed to eventually produce grease (for soap products) and fertilizer; rubbish, from which paper and other marketable materials were salvaged and ash which along with the non salable rubbish was land filled. The police department under the direction of Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt enforced the recycling law” (2009).

Under this plan, the sheer tonnage of garbage that had to be dealt with was cut down and it also eased some of the environmental stress that ocean and river dumping caused. But the rise of the Tammany Hall political machine

and the corruption and double-dealings that were taking place, killed Waring's plan. Just before the end of the 19th century, as more and more people were choosing New York as a place to reside, garbage went back to being dumped into the waters of the Hudson River and there was still no clear cut method established to handle New York's garbage issue.

As New York's population increased, city officials looked for a convenient way to dispose of wastes. In 1885, the U. S. Army built the nation's first garbage incinerator on Governor's Island in New York City harbor {2011}. This feat sounded like a good idea until people started noticing that the fumes from burning all that garbage was full of chemicals that weren't too good for people to be breathing. The residue ash was also toxic and that had to be dumped somewhere. {2011}. This was a failure again by city government as officials believed incinerators solved their disposal problems.

Additionally, some 22 incinerators were built and billed to the citizens of New York. In 1947, the Fresh Kills Landfill opened amidst protests at City Hall. Cornelius Hall the Staten Island Borough President and Robert Moses, the City Planning Commissioner had their own back room dealings where each saw their own benefits. Hall figured the land fill was the answer to his vision of an oceanfront highway and Moses thought the landfill would help solve a solid waste problem that was brought on by an inadequate waste infrastructure.

In an effort to please the public, Moses promised that Fresh Kills would be a temporary “ clean fill” receiving no municipal solid waste and the Staten Island dump was only to be used for three years (allegedly the time it would take to build a large incinerator in every borough). Over fifty years later,

Fresh Kills was still open and receiving over 13, 000 tons of residential municipal solid waste per day from all five boroughs of New York {2001}.

By the 1960s, one-third of the city's trash was burned in over 17, 000 apartment building incinerators and 22 municipal incinerators. The remaining residential refuse was still sent to Fresh Kills and the city's other landfills (Miller 2000: xix, 233). As environmental awareness grew, opposition to incineration and land filling increased. Old landfills and incinerators were gradually shut down, with the last municipal incinerator closed in 1992.

By the late 1990s, the entire city's residential waste ended up at Fresh kills—which became one of the tallest human made structures on earth. (Earth Institute 2001: A-2). These days New York's waste from those ubiquitous white garbage collection trucks is dumped onto the floor of waste transfer stations that are typically located in poor neighborhoods, and then loaded onto large trucks for shipment out of New York City. The current system of waste export leaves the city vulnerable over the long run, as both restrictions on waste disposal and its costs are likely to escalate.