

Waste is a complex and sometimes controversial issue. Good business for some, a bothersome problem for others and a threat to health for yet another category of people. Obtaining reliable data on waste is a difficult undertaking. Definitions vary across countries, so does reporting discipline. Despite efforts by international organisations to facilitate comparison by providing standardised questionnaires for reporting waste quantities, caution is required when singling out possible "culprits". Perhaps they were just more diligent in their reporting? Numbers are also a way to fight for a political cause, and can always be read in different ways.

For Vital Waste Graphics we use data from various sources: NGOs, international organisations, the official Basel Convention database, specialised publications and scientific research.

Data on several waste types is subject to estimation. Expert opinions differ considerably when it comes to the estimation of total amount of a specific waste type and its share of total waste. This might result in potentially contradictory statements even within this publication.

Realising the controversy the choice of a certain dataset may cause, we ask our readers to bear in mind the above and display understanding. The aim is to describe phenomena and pinpoint trends, not to accuse individuals or countries.

As data collection systems, definitions and reporting discipline improve over time, so too will the quality and usefulness of our publication, and thus the quality of the debate it informs. In the meantime, we hope you will enjoy this work, join in debate and think about how you can contribute to rising to the global waste challenge.

Dear readers,

Welcome to the second edition of *Vital Waste Graphics*. Building on the popularity of the first edition in 2004, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes and their Disposal has produced this edition in partnership with UNEP-GRID/Arendal with financial support from UNEP's Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (UNEP/DELCO).

In this edition we have summarised key issues and highlighted global trends in waste with accessible graphics, maps and texts both within and beyond the scope of the Basel Convention.

Our prime aim is to raise public awareness of the need for environmentally sound waste management. But we must go further. We are now addressing readers as producers and consumers of goods and the document consequently hinges on waste-related issues such as production, distribution, consumption and disposal. Collectively we must reduce waste output at every stage of a product's life, manage waste more effectively and conserve natural resources. The more information we have on problems and solutions, the more we can achieve.

Individual consumers can do a great deal to cut waste output. But we need to rethink the way we consume too.

Before a product reaches its point of sale, it has already caused several times its own weight in waste. In rich countries for every rubbish bag put out by households 70 times more waste is produced in mining, logging, farming, oil and gas exploration, and industrial processes used to convert raw materials into finished products and packaging.

Economic growth does not necessarily mean more waste. There are alternatives. Producers and consumers can work on green design and environmentally sound production methods, sustainable management of natural resources and new ways of replacing toxic components in products. We can all contribute to integrated management of product life-cycles.

Vital Waste Graphics 2 will be launched at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Basel Convention. The meeting is focusing on electronic waste, currently the fastest growing waste stream. In 1998 six million tonnes of e-waste was produced. Today, e-waste accounts for 8 per cent of the municipal waste stream. The volume of e-waste is expected to increase by 3 to 5 per cent a year, nearly three times faster than the overall rate. Accordingly several sections of the publication focus on mobile-phone production, use and disposal.

Readers will also find the latest data from the Basel Convention Secretariat, related organisations, and research carried out specially for the document, backed by links to additional sources.

With more efficient manufacturing and consumer processes, we can reduce pressure on essential resources, improve public health and protect the environment.

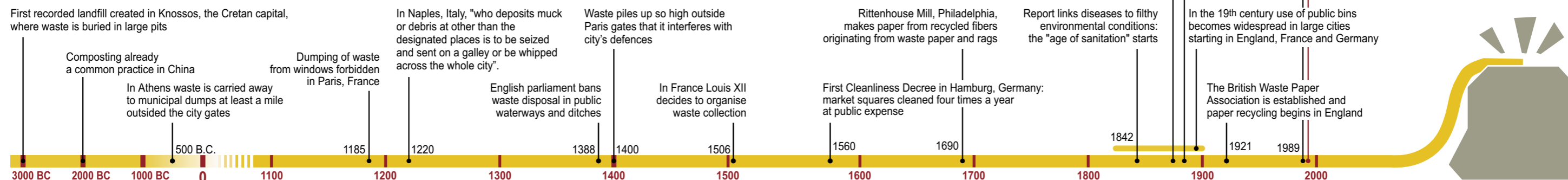
Gathering waste-related data is a major challenge. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the experts involved in this project for their valuable contribution to the publication.

I hope you enjoy Vital Waste Graphics 2.

Geneva, November 2006

Sachiko Kuwabara-Yamamoto,
Executive Secretary
Basel Convention

A history of waste management in selected anecdotes



Sources: US Environmental Protection Agency; National Energy Education Development Project, Museum of Solid Waste, 2006; Ecollect, 2006; Waste online, 2006; Environment Switzerland 2000; Stadtreinigung Hamburg.