



Material Waste Management





Learning Outcomes

- To think critically about what we “throw away”
- Consider the environmental impact of material waste
- Brainstorm ways to positively impact our community in ways related to material waste





Agenda

1. Examine how much stuff we throw away as a society and as individuals
2. Learn about what happens to our waste once it's disposed of
3. Write a story of a plastic bottle





What is material waste?

Everything we “throw away” is material waste!

What are some examples of material waste?

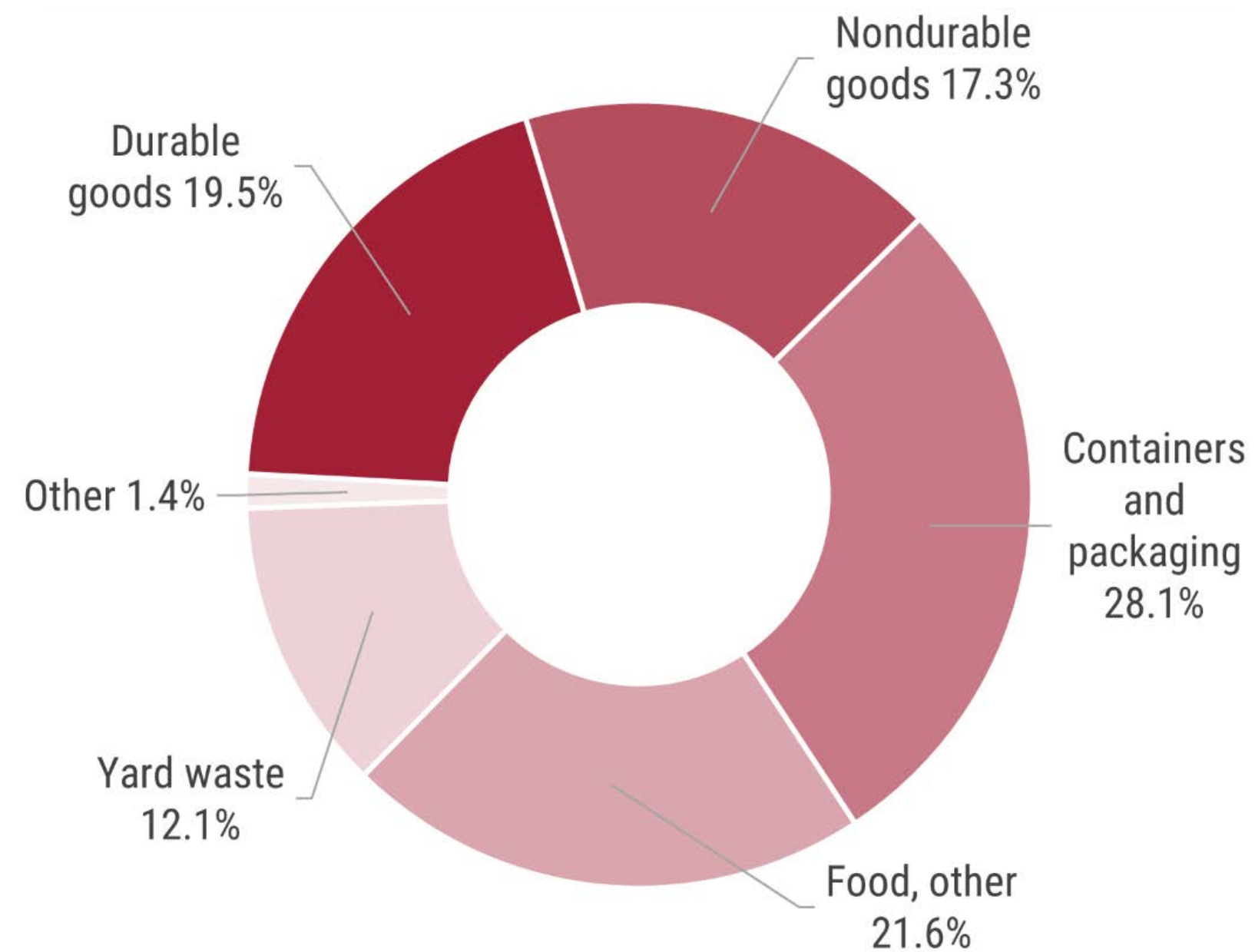


Guiding Questions

What do we mean when we say “throw away”, or “dispose of”?

How can we make our community’s interaction with material waste more sustainable?





How much stuff do we throw away?

The big picture in the US:

- The average American throws away 4.9 lbs daily - almost 1800 lbs per person yearly!
- 28% of what Americans throw away is packaging, typically thrown out immediately after the product has been purchased or used.
- Almost 20% of what we throw away are “durable goods.”

Source: <https://environmentamerica.org/center/resources/trash-in-america-2/>





How much stuff do we throw away?

How does this relate to climate change?

About 42% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are created in the process of extracting resources, producing goods, transporting materials, and disposing of waste.

- Fossil fuels are burned to power factories that produce goods.
- Forests get cut down to make wood and paper products.
- Large quantities of water required to produce cotton to make clothes.
 - It takes 2,700 liters of water to produce one T-shirt—that's enough for one person to drink for 900 days!





What happens to our waste?

- Landfill or incinerator: 62%, including lots of plastic
- The ocean: an estimated 16.5 million tons of plastic washes into the world's oceans every year
- Other countries: waste often gets exported to other countries





What happens to our waste?

What about recycling?

[Is Your Plastic Actually Being Recycled? | NYT Opinion](#) (5 mins)

Reflections:

- What are your thoughts about this video? What did you learn? Did anything surprise you?
- What plastics (by number) are recyclable in our community?



What did you throw away today?

- What have I thrown away today?
- Did I have any other options other than throwing it away? Could it have been reused again for its original purposes, or could it have been reused for a different purpose?
- Where did it go once I threw it away? Where will it end up?



Revisiting the guiding questions

Alter or add to your responses from the beginning based on what you learned today

What do we mean when we say “throw away”, or “dispose of”?

How can we make our community’s interaction with material waste more sustainable?



Additional Resources

- [Wasted: 50 million tonnes of e-waste every year](#): UN Environment Programme - Many countries are challenged by the considerable environmental and human health risks of inadequately managed Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), widely known as e-waste.
- [The lies that sell fast fashion](#): Vox - E-commerce has completely warped our view of what items should cost and how long they should last as we move through trends at an unprecedented pace, and it's doomed to get worse if we don't adjust our buying habits and learn to slow down.
- [War on Waste - Waste Audit](#): The Bundaberg Region audited three household bins and found that nearly three-quarters of the contents could have gone elsewhere.
- [What Happens To NYC's 3.2 Million Tons Of Trash I Big Business I Business Insider](#): Business Insider - New York City is one of the most wasteful cities in the world, but none of its trash is processed in NYC; it's sent to waste-to-energy facilities and landfills as far away as Ohio and South Carolina.
- [The Story of Plastic \(Animated Short\)](#): The Story of Stuff Project - This animated short pulls back the curtain on the plastic pollution headlines, revealing the true causes and consequences of the global plastics crisis.





Contributors

Walking Softer would like to thank CJ O'Brien of the Surfrider Foundation, and Harshitha Venati for contributing to the material waste management learning materials.

