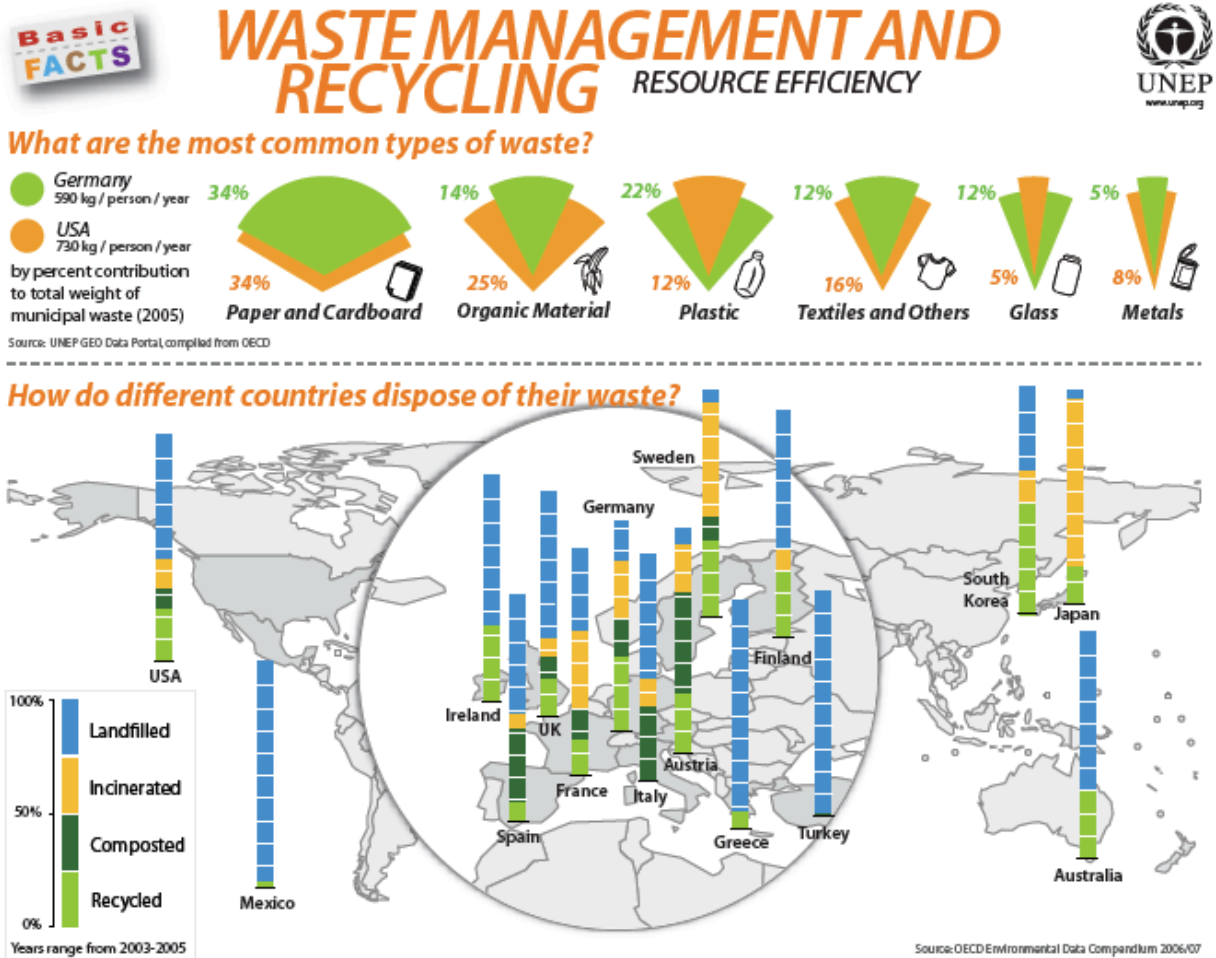


## Extend Your Listening What's For English

### Waste



Click [HERE](#) to see the original poster and [HERE](#) to other posters produced by the UNEP.

### Pre-Questions

1. Do you know how much waste your country produces per capita?
2. How are people in your country trying to reduce waste?
3. How successful has recycling been in your country?

4. Which country would you guess produces more waste per capita: USA or Germany?

5. Would you suppose that Germany produces less paper waste per person than the USA? YES..... NO.....

6. Which country has a greater percentage of plastics in its waste: USA or Germany?

7. Which of the following countries would you expect to use landfill as a major source of waste disposal: USA, Sweden, Japan?

8. Which country would you expect to use incineration as a major source of waste disposal: South Korea, Japan, Australia?

9. Which country has been most successful at recycling: South Korea, United Kingdom, Sweden?

10. What is a good way to dispose of organic waste: landfill, recycling, composting?

Waste. It's not a pretty topic - but it can be pretty interesting. Do you know much about how waste is treated in your country? Is waste an issue? Are people trying to reduce or cut down the total amount of waste they produce? Are they trying to dispose of waste in ways that are safe and clean? Are they trying to recycle more waste?

With the world's population continuing to grow, waste is clearly an issue in almost every country. Rich countries appear to produce too much waste and people want to reduce the consumption of resources. But in the developing world, waste management may be too expensive; so more people are harmed by waste - even if they don't produce as much of it.

So today's podcast is about waste - and how different countries manage and treat their waste. The information comes from a poster produced by the UNEP - that's the United Nations Environment Program. And there is a lot of information on this poster, so I'd recommend that you download it - there's a link on my site at [www.whatsforenglish.com/listening](http://www.whatsforenglish.com/listening). You would give your listening comprehension a good workout by listening to me describe and discuss the information while looking at the poster.

The title of the poster is **Waste Management and Recycling: Resource Efficiency**. It's divided into four sections. At the top there's a comparison between the United States and Germany and the waste they produce.

In the next section, we'll learn how several different countries dispose of their waste. How much is recycled, composted, incinerated or landfilled. The choices countries make are so different, the data here may surprise you.

The two sections at the bottom focus on glass, paper, aluminum and plastic; specifically, how each of these compares in terms of production and recycling efficiency. Which of these materials is easier to recycle? Which consumes more energy to produce and then to recycle? This is also quite interesting because each of these materials has clear benefits and drawbacks.

In the interest of time I'm not going to say any more about the bottom half of the poster. I'm going to focus on the top two sections only.

So... Back up to the top. The U.S. and Germany: which country produces more waste per person? No surprise. Americans produce 730 kg per person/per year, while the Germans produce 590 kg of waste per person/per year. But the graphic also shows what percentage of total waste is made up of paper and cardboard, organic material, plastic, textiles and others, glass and metals. The information here is pretty interesting. Americans and Germans produce about the same amount of paper and cardboard waste: 34% of the total. And that's interesting, because I'd heard that regulations in Germany were pretty strict about requiring manufacturers to recycle packaging they use for their products. Nevertheless both countries end up with about the same amount of paper and packaging waste.

But they differ in the amount of organic material waste: Organic material comprises 25% of American waste, but 14% of German waste. Do the Germans just eat much more of their food? What do you think? My guess is that food costs less in the US, and Americans end up wasting more. Moving on now - to plastic waste. And it's the Germans who have more plastic in their waste - 22% compared with 12% in America. The Germans also throw away more glass - 12% of the total compared with only 8% in America. On the other hand, the Americans throw out more metal - 8% as opposed to 5%. Any ideas as to why the Germans have a fairly large amount of plastic and glass in their waste? Perhaps they use a lot more plastic and glass packaging. But it's hard for me to believe that anyone would use more plastic than Americans. Or perhaps the Americans manage to recycle more plastic and glass. I don't know.

The final difference here concerns the amount of textiles or other materials in the waste. In the US it's 16% and in Germany it's 12%. Like organic waste, my feeling is that textiles - especially clothing may be relatively cheaper in the US and so a greater amount may end up in the waste stream.

Now I'd like to move on to how different countries dispose of waste. In this graphic we see the proportion of waste that is landfilled, incinerated, composted and recycled.

Let me explain what some of these terms mean. Landfilled means dumped in large pits and buried. A landfill is another word for a garbage dump. You may have heard of another meaning of landfill; that is the artificial land that's created by filling in

bays or seaside areas. That's also called landfill. A landfill (notice its a count noun) is a garbage dump. But landfill (no "a" - it's non-count) is an area of artificially-created land. My apartment in Japan is built on landfill. Incinerate means to burn - particularly to burn in a large furnace, called an incinerator. Composting is a means of processing organic waste and allowing it to break down so that it can be returned to the Earth - in the form of fertilizer. And recycling... well you should know what recycling is - processing or reprocessing the materials so that they can be used again.



A Landfill (Photo by [D'arcy Norman](#) on Flickr)

So... let's look at this graphic. A quick glance shows us that landfill is probably the most common form of waste disposal. But some countries do incinerate more of their waste than landfill it. Recycling is used to a significant degree in almost all the countries. And a number of countries - particularly in central or southern Europe - also dispose of waste by composting it.



Built on Landfill (Photo by Gerald)

There are three countries that rely almost entirely on landfill for disposing of waste. That's Mexico, Greece and Turkey. Probably land is relatively cheap in these countries; or more accurately, incineration technologies are too expensive. But I wonder about Greece, though. It is a member of the EU - so it isn't exactly a developing country - and it isn't so large, either. I don't imagine they have a lot of spare land to use as a garbage dump.

Australia and the USA also landfill over 50% of their waste. Two very big countries with lots of cheap land. But both countries also recycle about 30% of their waste. Many Australians and Americans are concerned about issues of sustainability and wasting resources, and so there is political pressure to recycle. Even if landfill is cheap, people in cities may feel that landfills are environmental hazards - they cause air and water pollution. And so there's pressure to reduce waste in landfill.

Move your eyes over to Japan - and you'll notice some different choices in how they dispose of waste. 75% of waste is incinerated. Only 5% is dumped in landfill. And while I thought the Japanese were way ahead on recycling, only 20% is recycled. The Japanese would probably say their choices are a result of the environment: a small island nation with lots of mountains and little arable land. Landfill is almost impossible.

But if that's the case, why would some other small island nations, such as the UK and Ireland use landfill to such a greater degree? The UK and Ireland actually landfill more of their waste than the Americans - 65%! Perhaps there's some other political force at work. It looks to me that the countries that incinerate a lot of their waste - namely France, Germany, Sweden and Japan - all have powerful, influential engineering companies that make or sell incineration technology. And they probably have political systems or tax policies that make it easy for these companies to sell their technology to city governments. Anyway - I'm sure that's a big part of the story here in Japan. And - I mean - why would Sweden - such a large country with a small population - have to incinerate 55% of its waste - unless the companies that make the equipment have an influence? Sweden should be more like Finland - don't you think? Finland landfills 60%, recycles 30% and incinerates just 10% of its waste.



Waste Incinerator in Japan (Photo by Gerald)

Let's talk about composting now for a minute. As I said, it's quite significant in Spain, Italy and especially Austria, where about 50% of waste is composted. I was curious about this and wanted to learn more. It seems that in Austria there is a well-organized system that processes the streams of sewage waste, household organic waste, farm and slaughterhouse waste on an industrial scale. Some of this is processed as fertilizer - for farmers, but some is also used for other products, such as biogas - an alternative fuel source.

Lastly I'd like to look at South Korea. This really stands out. South Korea is a small country without a lot of arable land - like Japan. But here, while 40% of waste is landfilled, 50% is recycled! More than any other country on this poster. Only 15% is incinerated. That's impressive. I guess the South Korean government put in some new policies to get people to start recycling more. On the other hand, a South-Korean friend tells me, however, that the mindset for recycling is not necessarily something very new there. He noted that in the 50s and 60s South Korea was still a pretty poor country. And at that time, for example, people didn't throw out books and newspapers. They'd bundle them up and put them outside and they'd be

collected by people who used the paper for some purpose - making bags or something. So when the government began to adopt more extensive recycling - and people have to do a lot of separation of waste in South Korea - the people were already somewhat accustomed to the idea. So they could get large numbers of South Koreans to start recycling pretty easily. Maybe in some other countries it's difficult to get recycling going on such a large scale because people don't like to be inconvenienced. Anyway - it's impressive. Other countries should perhaps study how the South Koreans manage to recycle so much of their waste. Perhaps it's also a matter of terminology. Maybe some waste that is "recycled" in South Korea would be termed "composting" in Austria.

Well... that's about all for now. We've been talking about waste today on Extend Your Listening. I hope you were able to download the graphic and follow along. If you have any questions or comments, please send them to me.

## **Comprehension Questions**

### **True or False**

1. Germany and the USA produce the same amount of waste per capita.
2. Compared with Germany, the USA produces a greater proportion of organic waste.
3. The most common form of waste in Germany and the USA is paper and cardboard.
4. The author believes that the Americans recycle more of their plastic than the Germans.
5. Landfilling means disposing of waste by dumping and (eventually) burying it.
6. Small island nations tend to avoid landfilling.
7. Finland and Sweden use the same forms of waste disposal.
8. Recycling is significant in the USA and Australia even though landfilling is cheaper.
9. Composting is more common in some Central and Eastern European countries.
10. The author believes that political forces influence the waste disposal choices in many (or most) countries.

**Synonyms.** Choose the One choice that is **incorrect**.

1. Americans **dispose of** too much organic waste.

- A. **throw out**
- B. **consume**
- C. **chuck out**
- D. **throw away**

2. Recycling is **growing in popularity** as a form of waste disposal.

- A. Recycling is **gaining ground** as a form of waste disposal.
- B. Recycling is **increasing in significance** as a form of waste disposal
- C. Recycling is **being promoted** as a form of waste disposal.
- D. Recycling is **taking off** as a form of waste disposal.

3. Sweden and Japan have **influential** companies that make incineration equipment.

- A. **powerful**
- B. **important**
- C. **corrupt**
- D. **well-connected**

4. The U.K. uses landfill **to a greater degree** than one might have expected.

- A. **more likely**
- B. **much more**
- C. **more thoroughly**
- D. **to a larger degree**

5. Where land is **relatively cheap**, landfilling is a common choice.

- A. **inexpensive**
- B. **abundant**
- C. **costs little**
- D. **depreciated**

**Vocabulary** Choose the correct word or word form.

1. Waste **disposal / disposing** is a major concern in many countries.

2. Do you know how the U.K. **disposed / disposes** its waste?

3. Where is to **recycle / recycling** especially popular these days?

4. Mexico and Turkey cannot afford **incineration / incinerated** technologies.

5. South Korea uses **landfill / a landfill** but it also **recycled / recycles** more waste than any other country.
6. The only way to decrease our waste is to reduce our **consumption / purchase** of materials.
7. Our town fears that a new **incineration / incinerator** will cause air pollution.
8. We must learn to manage waste **disposal / disposing** in a more effective manner.
9. **Compost / Composting** is a way to convert organic waste into bio gas.
10. Our **landfilling / landfill** is almost full.

### **Answers**

#### **True or False**

1. F; 2. T; 3. T; 4. F; 5. T; 6. F; 7. F; 8. T; 9. F; 10.

#### **Synonyms**

1. B; 2. C; 3. C; 4. A; 5. B

#### **Correct word or word form**

1. disposal; 2. disposes; 3. recycling; 4. incineration; 5. landfill - recycles; 6. consumption; 7. incinerator; 8. disposal; 9. Composting; 10. landfill