



NATIONAL

# WHERE DOES OUR PLASTIC GO?

– ASIAN LEADERS SAY CANADA NEEDS TO CLEAN UP ITS ACT

12 percent of our plastic junk to other destinations annually. We exported more than 10,000 tonnes of plastic waste to Malaysia in 2018 alone.

## THE CHINA FACTOR

China used to be the main destination for plastic garbage. It accepted up to two-thirds of the world supply to make and sell recycled goods. However, by 2018, it had had enough. It banned most plastic waste imports because too much of the junk couldn't be recycled.

Suddenly, all that garbage had nowhere to go – so unethical companies stepped in. For a fee, they said they could find new homes for it. They claimed it would be recycled. Instead, they sold it to firms that illegally dumped or burned most of it.

## WORKERS IN DANGER

Much of the waste we send to other countries is **contaminated** anyway. That makes it useless. Low-paid local workers extract material that still has value. The rest piles up and badly fouls their environment.

It also endangers health. Journalists found waste at a Malaysian dump that was two storeys high and about two

## CANADA'S BLUE BOX BLUES

Canadians generate 3.3 million tonnes of non-**biodegradable** plastic junk every year. About 2.8 million tonnes of this refuse ends up in Canadian landfills. Just nine percent of it is recycled. The rest is exported, incinerated, or tossed away. This waste threatens ecosystems, kills wildlife, and leaches toxic chemicals.

Experts say several factors contribute to this mess. For one thing, while municipalities usually run blue box programs, their responsibility ends after they collect the boxes. Then, private companies take over. These businesses want to make money. They try to sell recyclables to firms that turn plastic into pellets. These can then be transformed into other products. However, there aren't enough mills in North America to process plastic recyclables. So, recycling **brokers** sell whatever can't be processed in North America to companies overseas.

Another issue: since China no longer buys recyclables there is a **glut** on the market. That has slashed the value of our plastic items. As well, people and recycling plants often don't take the trouble to separate useable material from contaminated waste.

Bottom line: What can't be sold ends up dumped, buried, or burned. Recycling processes and techniques will improve. However, the only true solution, say environmentalists, is to make less of this garbage.

football fields wide. It oozed chemicals. And it just was one of many such sites.

"People [say they] can't even breathe if they [live] somewhere in the vicinity. The air is thick with toxic pollution," says Kathleen Ruff, a Canadian human rights worker.

## WE NEED TO DO BETTER

So will Canada keep off-loading its plastic waste? Ottawa did impose new rules in 2016. Exporters must now get permits

to ship the stuff off shore – and none have been issued. Yet our garbage keeps showing up in Asia. We need to do better.

"If we keep our waste in Canada, we will quickly become far more aware of the enormous amount of waste that we're producing," said professor Myra Hird. "We [must] to take responsibility for it. One way is [by keeping] it in our own country and, ideally, in our own region." ★

## DEFINITIONS

**BIODEGRADABLE:** capable of being slowly destroyed and broken down into very small parts by natural processes

**BROKER:** someone who arranges business deals for others

**CONTAMINATED:** something so dirty it is dangerous to use

**GLUT:** a supply of something that is much more than is needed or wanted



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## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. What are **non-biodegradable** plastics?

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2. How much non-biodegradable plastic waste is generated in Canada every year?

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3. How much of this waste ends up in landfills? How much is recycled?

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4. How does this waste affect the environment?

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5. Where do municipalities fit into the recycling program?

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6. Where do private companies fit into the recycling program? Explain.

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7. Where did much of this plastic waste end up before 2018?

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8. What happened after this country banned most plastic waste imports in 2018?

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9. What are some Asian countries doing with the waste they have received?

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

**An inference is a conclusion drawn from evidence.** *A plausible inference is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.*

What inferences can you draw from the fact that Canadians generate 3.3 million tonnes of non-biodegradable plastic refuse every year?

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## JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. As you see it, what is the importance of this story? Explain.
2. Why is plastic trash a problem? What solutions to this problem can you suggest? Explain.
3. *What if...* there were no plastic items? Explain.

## ONLINE

*Note:* The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/en/links](http://www.lesplan.com/en/links) for easy access.

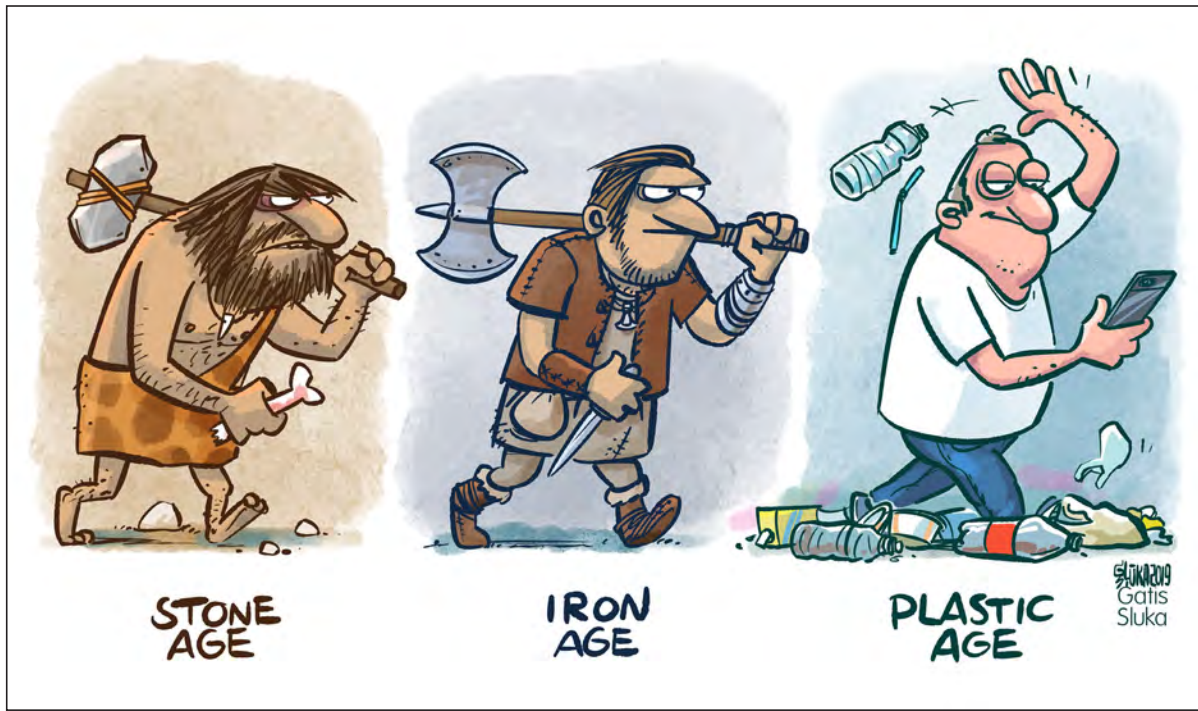
1. Read the Guardian's article 'Where Does Your Plastic Go?' at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jun/17/recycled-plastic-america-global-crisis>
2. Visit the Canadian Plastics Industry Association website at <https://www.plastics.ca/PlasticTopics/RecyclingPlastics> to find out more about different kinds of plastics and the challenges of recycling this material.
3. Read 'Is Canada's recycling industry broken?' at <https://globalnews.ca/news/5199883/canada-recycling-programs/>
4. Visit the North American Plastics Recycling Alliance website at <https://www.plasticsrecyclingalliance.org/> to find out more about continent-wide efforts to recycle plastic.
5. Watch 'Tracking your plastic: Exposing recycling myths' on CBC's Marketplace at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8aVYb-a7Uw> [20:31]. ★



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## YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon, then answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

1. What do you already know about plastic products – what we use them for and what we do with them once we no longer need them?
2. Describe what you *see* and *read* in the cartoon.
4. As you see it, what might the cartoonist be saying about our use of plastic products? Explain.
5. For what reasons do you agree with the cartoonist's perspective? For what reasons do you disagree? ★



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**Directions:** Respond to the infographic below. What information conveyed in the infographic is new to you? What is interesting to you? What seems to be especially significant? Why? Overall, how does the information in this infographic enhance your understanding of the problems related to plastic waste and recycling? Explain.

