



GETTING DOWN TO BASICS: Where Does Our Garbage Go?

To understand why waste prevention and recycling are important, let's look at what it takes to deal with garbage. Here's the Snohomish County story of garbage that seems to just "go away" when dumped in the can!

► Cathcart Landfill

For many years Snohomish County residents and businesses tossed their garbage into uncontrolled dumps, wetlands, or even Puget Sound. They weren't aware how much this harmed groundwater, air, soil, wildlife, vegetation, and human beings.

Then, new awareness resulted in laws requiring landfills to be specially designed with bottom liners and other features that reduced the impact of garbage on the surrounding area.

The Cathcart Landfill, built by Snohomish County in 1980, was one of the first landfills to be built under these new Federal regulations. It was an innovative, state-of-the-art landfill, featuring a bottom liner and a piping system to collect and treat rainwater and other liquids that percolated through the garbage. It was also designed to safely contain waste after it was closed. Located off Highway 9, south of Snohomish, Cathcart attracted solid waste specialists from all over the world who wanted to see this new technology.

In June of 1992, the Cathcart Landfill reached capacity and stopped accepting garbage or "solid waste." After closing, the landfill was capped with high-density polyethylene plastic. This "cap" liner was covered with compacted clays mixed with compost, and then hydro-seeded.

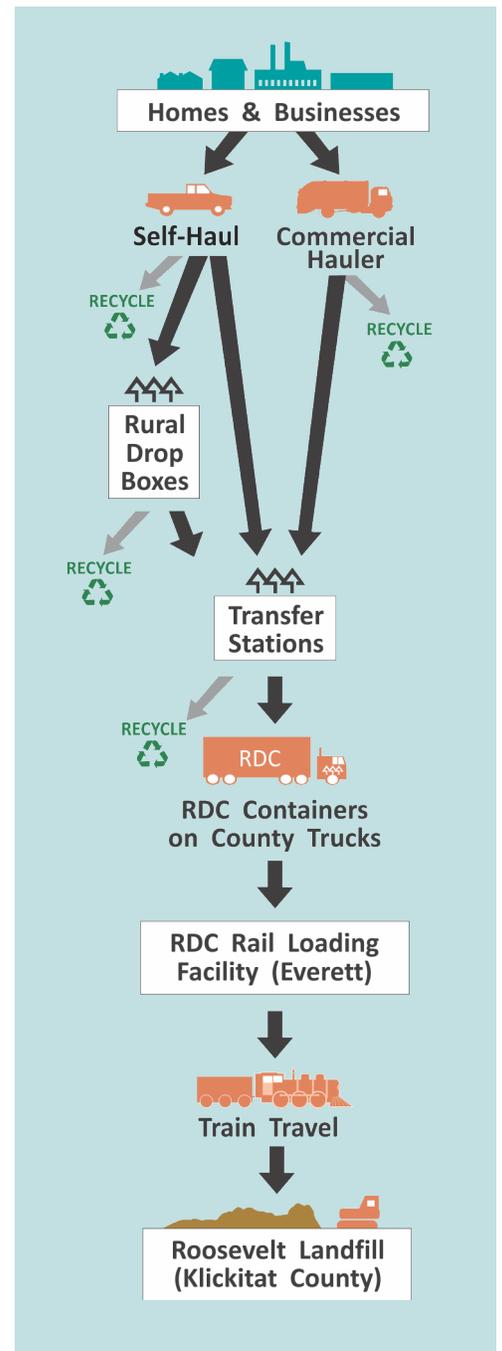
Although garbage is not accepted at the Cathcart Landfill anymore, various county operations still operate at the site.

► Waste Export

With the Cathcart Landfill full, in March 1992, the county decided to send its waste to the Roosevelt Landfill in Klickitat County. The process, called "waste export," includes:

- 1 Private haulers pick up garbage from the curb or dumpster and load it into garbage trucks. Some haul their garbage to a transfer station or rural drop box.
- 2 The private haulers take the garbage to one of three Snohomish County transfer stations located in Everett, Arlington, and Mountlake Terrace. County staff pick up the waste from rural drop box sites and transport it to the nearest transfer station.
- 3 At the transfer station, garbage is tipped (dumped), compacted into cubes weighing about 29 tons each, and pushed into shipping containers.
- 4 The full shipping containers are then trucked to the Regional Disposal Company (RDC) Rail Loading Facility in Everett.
- 5 The shipping containers are loaded onto a train and carried 360 miles to the small town of Roosevelt on the Columbia River (see map on back). The trip takes approximately 12 hours.
- 6 The shipping containers are removed from the train in Roosevelt and loaded onto trucks.
- 7 The garbage is trucked to the nearby Roosevelt Landfill and unloaded. The empty containers are returned to Snohomish County for re-use.

On average, about 70 shipping containers or approximately 2,100 tons of Snohomish County garbage every weekday goes to the rail facility for export to southeastern Washington.



► Roosevelt Landfill

Roosevelt Landfill is lined with compacted clay and high density polyethylene, to prevent "leachate" from contaminating the groundwater. Leachate is the result of rain-water leaching pollutants out of the garbage. The leachate is collected through a plumbing system installed throughout the landfill.

Methane gas, produced by decomposing garbage, is also collected through a similar system. This gas is used to produce electricity at the H.W. Landfill Gas Power Plant. Ten megawatts (enough electricity to service more than 8,000 homes) are generated from the methane at this time.

The garbage is dumped into "cells," or sections, to manage leachate and to organize the unloading procedure.

Every day the garbage is covered with soil to eliminate odors and to discourage seagulls, rodents, and other scavengers.



The Roosevelt Landfill property covers 2,545 acres (2.5 times the size of Lake Stevens or 10 times larger than Green Lake in Seattle). The landfill has a 40 year expected trash receiving life and a capacity of 120 million tons.

► Transfer Stations

We need transfer stations to safely and efficiently handle the large amount of recycling and garbage generated throughout the county. The county currently operates three transfer stations:

- 1 Airport Road Recycling and Transfer Station (ARTS), located near Paine Field in south Everett
- 2 Southwest Recycling and Transfer Station (SWRTS) in Mountlake Terrace
- 3 North County Recycling and Transfer Station (NCRTS) in Arlington

► Recycle, Reuse, and Prevent Waste

Many resources go into handling Snohomish County garbage. Time and labor, fuel, money, materials to produce trucks and trains, and other types of energy are consumed to transport this solid waste.

While this process is necessary to handle garbage safely, it is wasteful when recyclable or reusable items are dumped in the garbage.

Sending recyclables like aluminum cans, glass containers, newspaper, cardboard, mixed paper, scrap metal, food waste, yard clippings, clean wood, and plastic

bottles and jugs all the way to Klickitat County wastes precious natural resources including energy, water, trees, metals, oil, and more. These resources could be recycled into new products instead of being buried in the landfill.

Good, reusable items are also disposed of needlessly. People throw away bicycles, clothing, books, furniture, electronics, and many household items that could be donated to thrift stores, sold at garage sales, or given to others who could use them.

Re-using keeps these still useable items out of the landfill and helps others. It also extends the life of the things, thus valuing the natural resources that went into making them.

Avoiding wasteful packaging and poor quality items also helps reduce waste. Use sturdy durables instead of disposables. Filling our landfills with "convenience" items or with unneeded packaging is truly unnecessary.

Wise use of resources is one of the best reasons for choosing to prevent waste, reuse, and recycle.

► How You Can Get Involved

You can help keep the environment healthy and save taxpayer money by learning about solid waste, taking steps to recycle and prevent waste, and encouraging others to do the same.

These choices will affect the quality of life for you, your family, and for many generations to come.

Thank you for thinking about these important issues. If you have questions, please call the Solid Waste office at 425-388-3425, press "0", or 1-800-562-4367, ext. 3425. Website: www.snoco.org/solidwaste

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