

## Poland dumps old garbage system for greener setup

May 28 2013, by Stanislaw Waszak

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A waste dump site is seen on the outskirts of Polish capital Warsaw on May 24, 2013. Poland, where 20 percent of urban waste ends up at illegal waste dumps, is working out on a new waste treatment legislation.

With too many people chucking their garbage into neighbours' bins—or worse, the woods—to avoid paying for disposal, Poland has taken on a massive overhaul of its laissez-faire waste management system.

The new greener setup, which enters into force in July, will lower the incentive to litter by requiring everyone to pay a municipal disposal tax for a service that up to now has been left up to each household to coordinate.

While [Poland](#) has a long way to go to catch up to green superstars like Austria or Germany—which recycle or [compost](#) over 60 percent of their rubbish—the new system should help bring Warsaw into line with EU norms.

"It will be revolutionary," says Tadeusz Arkit, head of a parliamentary commission in charge of waste management for the EU member of 38 million people.

Present laws leave it up to each household and business to sign a contract with one of the many garbage collection companies, but the model has proven difficult to implement and oversee.

The system is "fair in theory" because everyone pays for his own share, Arkit told AFP.

"But it's not effective since there are many people who, to avoid paying, dump their trash into others' garbage bins or toss it outdoors."

Last year, the [European Commission](#) rapped Poland and 11 other eastern and southern EU members for lagging on the environmental front.

Though Poland generates less municipal waste per person than the EU average, more of it winds up being left untreated and illegally tossed into the wild.

Of the 315 kilograms (695 pounds) of waste each Pole produced in 2011, 60 kilograms wound up as litter, according to the Eurostat data

agency.

That compares to the EU average of 503 kilograms of waste per person and 17 kilograms litter.



A man walks on a landfill site on the outskirts of Polish capital Warsaw on May 24, 2013. Starting July 1, municipalities will be responsible for coordinating garbage collection and recycling for their district as a whole.

But perhaps even more telling is what Poland does with the 255-[kilogram](#) majority that it treats: it dumps 71 percent into [landfills](#), burns one percent, and recycles or composts 28 percent.

The EU average, in comparison, is 37 percent landfilled, 23 percent burnt, and 38 percent recycled or composted.

The new system is expected to both cut down on litter and increase the recycling rate.

Starting July 1, municipalities—and not individual households—will be responsible for coordinating garbage collection and recycling for their district as a whole.

Most are expected to hold tenders to contract out the services.

Households will pay a monthly tax calculated by each municipality based on its criteria of choice: number of residents, home square footage, water usage, flat rate.

"Now, once the tax is paid, people won't have a reason to empty their garbage cans in the woods," Arkit said.

The change will particularly affect homes, since apartment buildings already have communal garbage bins whose cost is included in the rent.



People walk on a landfill site on the outskirts of Polish capital Warsaw on May 24, 2013. Though Poland generates less municipal waste per person than the EU average, more of it winds up being left untreated and illegally tossed into the wild.

The new system, while eco-friendly, has not won over everyone, with Warsaw's mayor forced to lower certain planned taxes because of complaints.

And Poles are still coming up with ways to cheat the system.

To pay a lower tax rate, some apartment owners have claimed fewer residents on forms.

"Based on the declarations submitted to my housing co-op, I think only 600,000 people will pay for [garbage](#) disposal, of Warsaw's total

population of two million," Zbigniew Gawron, head of an association of Warsaw housing cooperatives, was quoted as saying by the Gazeta Wyborcza daily.

The Constitutional Court has already received several complaints over the legislation.

"In Warsaw, the new law is a mess," said Jaroslaw Krajewski, a spokesman for the main opposition party PiS.

But industry officials stress that it will promote infrastructure development and open up new markets in the country.

In March, French water and [waste management](#) group Veolia Environnement opened a giant sewage treatment plant in the capital, together with a Polish subsidiary of Vinci and Germany's WTE.

Warsaw funded 60 percent of the 565-million-euro (\$730-million) investment, while EU funds covered the rest.

Last month, France's Suez Environnement inked a 850-million-euro contract to build and run an incinerator for 25 years in the western city of Poznan, which will double as a heating plant.

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Citation: Poland dumps old garbage system for greener setup (2013, May 28) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-05-poland-dumps-garbage-greener-setup.html>

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