

Rio closes Latin America's biggest landfill

June 4 2012



A 'catadore' (scavenger) digs through rubbish at the Jardim Gramacho landfill, the biggest in South America, in Rio de Janeiro in May 2012. The landfill was closed after 34 years, just days before Rio de Janeiro hosts a major UN conference on sustainable development.

Latin America's largest landfill was closed Sunday after 34 years, just days before Rio de Janeiro hosts a major UN conference on sustainable development.

Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes and Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira closed the entrance to Jardim Gramacho, a seaside mountain of malodorous trash where some 8,000 tons of waste were processed a day.

"From now on, Rio will no longer accept environmental crimes like Gramacho was for over 30 years," said Paes.

The sprawling trash dump of approximately 140 hectares (345 acres)

was considered a major [environmental threat](#) to Rio's Guanabara Bay, due to leaks caused by poor waste management.

Its closure was agreed in 2004, but the decision was postponed several times until a deal was reached to do it ahead of the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development set for June 20-22.

At least 100 global leaders and 50,000 participants from around the world are expected for the summit, which aims to outline a path toward a "green" and social economy that can balance economic growth, poverty eradication and environmental protection.

About 1,600 people who made a living from sorting through the debris by hand, known as "catadores," will receive compensation from the city.

"This is a breakthrough for the environment and the country. We will use this as a model to close all landfills" that damage the ecosystem, said Teixeira.

The waste at Gramacho is due to be transferred to another [landfill](#) run by a private company. At the Gramacho site, a biogas plant will be launched to reduce [methane emissions](#) in the atmosphere.

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