



## Burgeoning Consumer Societies Create Waste Disposal Problems in Asia's Cities

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**Asia's rapid economic development has led to rising incomes and western-style consumption patterns, particularly in the region's urban centers. One result is that mountains of waste, from plastic bags to discarded mobile phones, are threatening to overwhelm some of Asia's cities. Claudia Blume reports from VOA's Asia News Center in Hong Kong.**



Greenpeace activist Heike Tierbach from Hamburg, Germany, collects debris from the water mostly of plastics in Manila Bay, 16 Aug. 2006

In Asia's rural areas, people traditionally recycle or re-use the products they buy. But the region's newly affluent city dwellers are increasingly emulating Western consumption patterns.

They not only buy more but, according to the Asian Development Bank, about 80 percent of all products bought in Asia's urban centers are discarded after a single use.

Chettiyappan Visvanathan, professor at the Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani, Thailand, says as a result, the amount of waste is growing.

"If you look at almost all the urban centers in Asia, the per capita waste generation is increased," he noted. "If you take an example, in the case of Hong Kong, it is almost between four and five kilos per person per day, which is much more than the New York volume, but if you look at countries like India maybe the urban per capita consumption is one kilogram per person per day, whereas in rural areas it is around .4 or .5 kilograms per person per day."

The Asian Development Bank says the average daily output of solid waste from Asia's largest cities is about 760,000 tons. That is expected to increase to almost 2 million tons per day by 2025.

Cities are already struggling to find new landfill sites to cope with the rise in garbage.

The nature of waste has changed too, from mainly organic to plastic and other packaging waste. This makes recovery, treatment and disposal more complicated and more expensive.

A growing amount of electronic or e-waste, such as discarded computers and mobile phones, is giving municipalities the biggest headache.

Professor Visvanathan says e-waste often contains hazardous toxic components that are difficult to process.

"Normal municipal solid waste [management] is not designed to handle this waste, because they have very toxic components, and if you ask me, the biggest proportion of toxic waste today originates from this e-waste," he said.

At a recent meeting in Manila, the ADB urged regional governments and the private sector to encourage the reduction and recycling of waste. Some of the more developed countries in Asia have already taken action.

Visvanathan says that in Singapore, for example, the fee for trash disposal is based on the amount of waste a consumer produces. In Japan, shopping centers have stopped handing out free plastic bags. And in Taiwan, government action has decreased the amount of waste so dramatically that some incinerators are closing down, because they have nothing to burn.