

The Sensible Environmentalist

Landfill Issue Isn't Lack of Space

(NAPSA)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**
Are we running out of landfill space?

It depends where you are. Nationally, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says that landfill space is plentiful. But in



Dr. Moore

areas that are heavily populated, such as the East Coast, it's a different story. There's less current landfill capacity and fewer potential sites—which also means that disposal costs are higher.

Even so, environmental issues related to landfills tend to have more to do with where they're located and how to control pollution than they do with running out of room.

Modern landfills are heavily regulated and built with environmental protection in mind, but they aren't foolproof. They include clay or plastic liners, systems to collect both contaminated water and gases that form during the decaying process, and covering caps to permanently seal each section that becomes full. To minimize odor and discourage rats and insects, the waste is also covered each day with soil.

One issue causing some controversy is what to do with captured landfill gas, which is comprised

mostly of methane and carbon dioxide. Methane is by far more potent, but both contribute to smog and are thought to cause global warming.

The U.S. government has started an initiative to encourage the use of landfill gas for energy. As an alternate to fossil fuels such as coal and oil, this has environmental benefits—even though it isn't as “green” as other sources such as wind, solar and geothermal. According to the U.S. EPA, more than 350 landfills have energy programs in place, and another 600 have the potential to produce enough electricity to power more than one million homes.

Whether or not landfill space is plentiful or we're finding ways to deal with landfill pollution, it's useful to bear in mind that the U.S. and Canada generate more solid waste than any other industrial nation, with respective averages of 4.5 and 3.75 pounds per person each day. It makes sense to reduce waste where possible and extend the life of our resources through recycling.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.