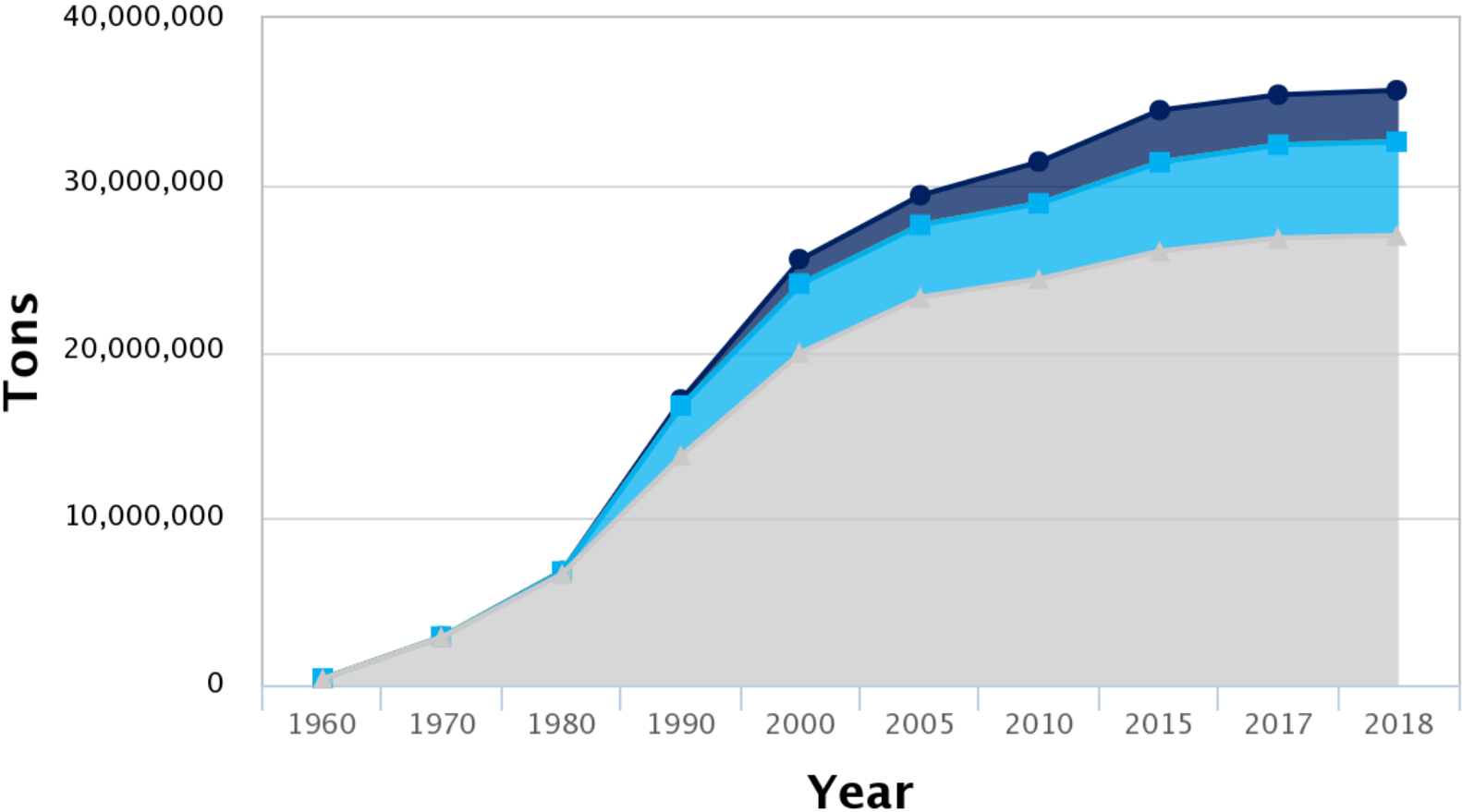


Plastics Waste Management: 1960-2018



What is going on?

Click on legend items below to customize items displayed in the chart

- Recycled
- Composted
- Combustion with Energy Recovery
- Landfilled

What The Graph 35: teacher notes

Notes/comments

- Extraordinarily, this has been produced by part of the USA government, the Environmental Protection Agency!
- It shows the amount of plastic that is thrown away. It starkly shows that plastic just wasn't used in 1960, but that its deployment has rocketed over the intervening years.
- There are three commonly used types of 'ton':
 - The 'long ton' was part of the Imperial system in the UK and is 2,240 lb (160 stones) which is approx 1016kg.
 - The 'short ton' is used in the USA (it is what is used here) and is 2000 lb (they don't use stone in the US) which is approx 907kg.
 - The 'tonne' is exactly 1000kg and is the metric unit (which we use nowadays).
- The population of the USA is about 330 million. How much plastic is discarded per American? It's about 1/10 of a ton, which is about 100kg per person per year. That feels huge! About 1/3 of a kg each day. (This includes manufacturing rubbish as well as home bin collections, though.)
- The x-axis is awful! It appears to show only the years indicated, initially with a gap of 10 years (to get from 1960 to 2000), then with a gap of 5 years (up to 2015) and then two additional years plonked on the end. What is the effect of this? We can clearly see the amounts of plastic waste for each of the years, but we can't judge the increase properly.
- It is amusing to see that 'composted' is in the key – and no plastic (unsurprisingly) is ever composted!
- What fraction is recycled? About a tenth? The rest is burned or buried.

Source:

- <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data>