

## Gold in Garbage

Each day the average American tosses out more than 5½ lbs. of solid waste. Garbage is piling up so fast that cities like Philadelphia and San Francisco may run out of landfill dumps by the end of this year. The obvious answer is to re-use all kinds of materials that are now being junked. But so far, the U.S. lacks enough incentives to make "recycling" economically attractive. Americans have become so prosperous that old ideas like deposit bottles no longer work. Who besides tiny children wants to lug empties back to the store just to collect a few cents?

Fortunately, a new technology of profitable recycling may soon emerge. In Delaware's New Castle County, for example, a company called Hercules, Inc. has plans for a remarkable plant that would gobble up anything from beer cans to tires, shred the stuff into small chunks, separate the different materials, and disgorge salable granules of glass, steel, aluminum and shredded paper. Organic wastes would be turned into a rich compost. Useless refuse would be incinerated, or "pyrolyzed"—burned in virtually airless furnaces. The state of Delaware has put up \$1,000,000 of the plant's \$10 million building cost. If the Federal Government agrees to share the rest, by next year the plant could handle 570 tons of refuse a day while turning out 262 tons of re-usable materials.

**Edible Paper.** In Manhattan this week, officials of the Aluminum Association and The Rust Engineering Co. announced plans for a \$15.8 million recycling plant near Washington. The plan has been submitted for consideration to the nonprofit National Center for Solid Waste Disposal, Inc., which evaluates and promotes waste-disposal techniques presented by various industries. If such industries are willing to share the cost, the plant will serve as a "national laboratory" where municipalities and private contractors can shop for ideas.

The Aluminum Association is convinced that the Washington plant could turn 130,000 tons of refuse a year into 52,000 tons of raw materials worth \$833,000 on the open market. Among them: glass to help surface highways and pelletized paper to be used as a blend for fertilizer, insulation products and additives in pet foods. The plant's incinerators would also generate steam for sale to utilities. If a city of 200,000 built such a plant, says the association, the net cost would be \$286,000 a year, compared with \$910,000 for handling the same amount of refuse by present disposal methods.

**Returnable Cars.** At least 100 municipalities, universities and industries are working on the solid-waste problem. Max Spendlove, research director of the U.S. Bureau of Mines' Metallurgy Research Center at College Park, Md.,

is reclaiming glass and metals from residue scooped from incinerators. At a cost of \$3.52 a ton, he says, his methods yield materials with a potential market value of \$12 a ton.

Last week New York City's environmental protection administrator, Jerome Kretchmer, suggested a way to recycle the 73,000 cars that New Yorkers abandon on the streets each year. He urged the state to enact a law making auto buyers give the state a \$100 deposit for new cars, auto owners \$50 for their present car. Once the cars were junked "in an environmentally acceptable manner," the money would be refunded—the old returnable-bottle scheme, but this time with a deposit worth collecting.

## End of the Barge Canal

President Nixon surprised and delighted conservationists last week by halting construction of the controversial Cross-Florida Barge Canal. About a third of the 107-mile-long waterway has already been built across northern Florida by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Cost to date: \$50 million, a great deal of money to go down the drain. But stopping the project, Nixon said, "will prevent a past mistake from causing permanent damage."

Conservationists never saw the canal as anything but a huge environmental blunder (TIME, April 13). By connecting the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the 9-ft.-deep waterway would have saved shippers a 600-mile journey around Florida. But, as Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality noted, its construction would have inundated the Oklawaha River basin, a unique and beautiful area abounding in wildlife. Critics also charged that the canal would pollute nearby ground-water supplies and they insisted that the locks would be too small to permit profitable traffic loads.

Two weeks ago, U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker suspended work on the project by granting a preliminary injunction brought by the lawyers of the Environmental Defense Fund. The judge rejected the corps's defense that it was merely acting as the agent of Congress, which cannot be sued unless it waives "sovereign immunity." He ruled that the corps had in fact not complied with the National Environmental Policy Act. Now that Nixon has stopped the project entirely, the next step will be for government bodies and environmentalists to work out what to do with both the completed parts of the waterway and the condemned land along its route.

President Nixon's action demonstrated that ecology is playing a bigger and bigger role in politics, a point Nixon emphasized in his State of the Union message (see THE NATION). Moreover, the order encouraged conservationists who hope that the Corps of Engineers will

shift its focus from building ecologically questionable canals and dams to more desperately needed projects. Among the top priorities: new sewage systems and water-treatment plants.

## Oil on Troubled Waters

Still upset by the 1969 Santa Barbara Channel blowout, which discharged 336,000 gallons of crude oil, Californians faced an even worse spill last week. This time two Standard Oil of California tankers collided in dense fog under Golden Gate Bridge and drifted helplessly into San Francisco Bay. With a 40-ft. gash in her hull, the *Oregon Standard* gushed 1,000,000 gallons of bunker fuel oil that soon coated beaches and wildlife sanctuaries for 50 miles of the coast. Some people were so incensed at Standard Oil that they hurled plastic bags full of oil at the company's downtown San Francisco office and dumped dead fish into the building's ornamental pool.

Meantime, however, thousands of more constructive citizens—hardhats, longhairs, soldiers, schoolchildren—joined in round-the-clock efforts to rescue birds and mop up beaches. Standard Oil rushed in big supplies of cleaning equipment. The Coast Guard launched an investigation. For one thing, most other shipping had been suspended during the fog, and the Standard tankers had no pilots. In addition state legislators introduced bills aimed at strengthening navigational and piloting safeguards in California's inland waters.

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"OREGON STANDARD" AFTER COLLISION  
Worse than Santa Barbara.

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