



Dispose of Waste Properly:

“Trash Timeline”

Audience: All ages. Groups of any size. With up to 22 people, each person can have an active part in this activity.

Time: 15-20 minutes.

Materials: 11 Pictures, some sheets of newsprint paper, a banana peel, a wool item (socks, cap, etc.), cigarette butt(s), disposable diaper(s), tin can(s), aluminum can(s), glass bottle(s), plastic holder(s) for a six-pack of soda cans, hard plastic items (water or juice bottles), a rubber tire, 11 printed cards or pages. Each page contains a single time period (e.g. 10-20 years), each page represents the number of years it takes for one of the pictured items to decompose

Leave No Trace Objective: To provide a visual and hands-on method exhibiting how long it takes for trash to decompose.

Directions: Distribute each of the pictures, one to each participant, or as many to each participant as necessary to distribute all of them, as evenly as possible. Distribute the time pages in a similar manner. Try to ensure that no person holds both a picture and its associated time page.

Then have the participants roam around trying to figure out what pictures match up with what time periods. As they make their matches, you can comment on their accuracy and have them try to correct any errors. See below for a list of the decomposition rates for common items:

Cigarette Butts ----- 1 to 5 years
Aluminum Can ----- 80 to 100 years
Plastic 6-pack Holder ----- 100 years
Orange or Banana Peel ----- Up to 2 years
Plastic Film Container ----- 20 to 30 years

Plastic Bags ----- 10 to 20 years
Glass Bottles ----- 1,000,000 years
Plastic Coated Paper ----- 5 years
Nylon Fabric ----- 30 to 40 years
Leather ----- 1 to 5 years
Wool Socks ----- 1 to 5 years
Tin Cans ----- 50 years

This activity gets the participants to talk to each other to figure out how long each item takes to decompose. When they finish, it would be nice to have them line up in order from shortest time to longest.