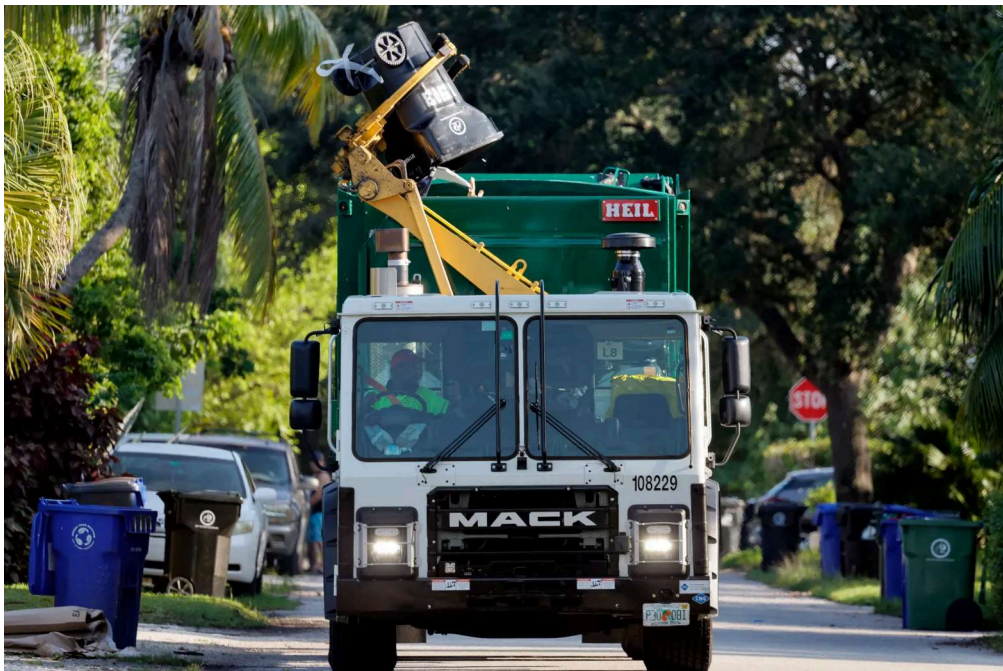


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The future is ours: So is Broward's waste problem | Opinion



(Amy Beth Bennett / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Trash is picked up in east Fort Lauderdale on Thursday, Aug. 24, 2023. (Amy Beth Bennett / South Florida Sun Sentinel)



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Our generation grew up hearing three words: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Reduce the amount of waste you generate by choosing objects with less packaging. Reuse items instead of throwing them away after their first use. Recycle waste materials into new objects, giving them a second chance.

We were told that if we followed these three Rs, we could save the planet and make a meaningful impact on the communities around us. Yet with decades of environmental education, residents in Broward County generate a staggering 5.3 million tons of waste each year.



Clockwise from top left: Siyona Narang, Jurnee Harrison and Inika Chemuru are part of the Broward Sierra Group Junior Team. (courtesy, Siyona Narang)

Although we are just high school students, we feel responsible for helping future generations of children have an efficient waste-disposal system that will not result in their living next to a landfill or waste-to-energy facility. But will the elected officials stop this waste from endangering our water system, air, and health?

In 2013, Broward County's recycling rate sat at 60%. As of 2024, that recycling rate [dropped to 38%](#), nearly half of the state of Florida's goal of

75%.

However, our waste can be reduced in several sustainable ways rather than relying on hazardous incinerators or non-eco-friendly landfills. That's where the [Solid Waste Authority of Broward County's Master Plan](#) can be the driving force by standardizing recycling, reducing waste and educating the public. Composting, reducing plastic consumption, and repurposing objects can help reduce countywide waste. But individual action alone cannot solve this crisis.

Broward County has a responsibility to broaden access for proper disposal, waste reduction and organic waste recovery. Individual and countywide action shouldn't be viewed as opposites. Instead, they should be treated like aspects of a more sustainable future. Relying on individuals reducing waste without proper infrastructure will not save us, but a long-term plan might.

According to [BrowardRecycles.org](https://www.browardrecycles.org), Broward's trash is projected to increase to 7.8 million tons in the next 44 years without intervention. Within that waste, among residential areas, 35% of it is compostable, 31% is recyclable, and 13% is potentially divertable — leaving only 21% of residential waste that is non-divertable and requiring landfill disposal. Commercially, there are comparable percentages for compostable, recyclable and potentially divertible waste (28%, 38% and 15%, respectively), leaving only 29% of waste as non-divertible. The Master Plan aims to capitalize on this and significantly reduce waste production in Broward County, with around 62% of waste potentially recoverable.

The Master Plan was made with the intention of making waste diversion more effective and sustainable, ensuring that “operations align with community expectations and environmental goals.” The plan includes specific expectations for different types of waste, from yard waste to recyclable materials, with a goal of diverting waste from landfills, and reducing the need for another incinerator to be built.

Currently, 21 out of the 28 municipalities and the county have voted in favor of the Master Plan. For passage, the plan requires 80% of the population of the participating cities to vote YES.

Moreover, Broward County is running out of options. Residents emphasize that they do not want another landfill or incinerator in their neighborhood. Construction and demolition debris make up a large portion of our waste, containing valuable material that can be recycled, but there is no current requirement for that.

The solution is not creating another “Mount Trashmore.” It is supporting the Solid Waste Authority: a unified countywide recycling system, stronger composting programs, and construction material recovery ordinances that could dramatically reduce waste, while saving taxpayers money. Lee County, for example, already has an effective program for recycling construction and demolition debris. Other Florida counties are already proving these programs work.

As high school students in Broward, what stands out to us most is the hypocrisy. We have always been told to think about the future, yet adults are debating policies that could permanently damage it. Our generation will inherit the environmental and economic consequences of today's decisions, so we at least deserve a voice in them.

If we want cleaner neighborhoods, healthier communities and a sustainable future, we can start at home by recycling, repurposing, repairing and composting to reduce waste. But lasting change requires broader action, so residents must also urge local leaders to support the Solid Waste Authority's Master Plan.

Siyona Narang, Jurnee Harrison and Inika Chemuru are passionate student leaders that are a part of the Broward Sierra Group Junior Team. Siyona Narang and Inika Chemuru attend American Heritage School's Plantation campus and Jurnee Harrison attends Western High School in Davie.