

## Managing Everest's Waste Problem

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### **The Problem**

*The accumulation of solid waste in the world's high mountain camping sites, base camps, and high camps has been a chronic problem facing alpine ecosystems since mountaineering first became popular in the 1850s. The problem has further intensified with the steady acceleration of trekking and mountaineering tourism in the past four decades.*

The issue of garbage at [Everest base camp](#) has made headlines in the international press nearly every spring since the early 1970s. Dozens of 'Everest Clean Up Expeditions' have been launched since then, some legitimate, others a way for climbers to pick up a few tin cans and spend the rest of the season climbing.

More organised efforts of the [Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee \(SPCC\)](#) began some 10 years ago. Camp garbage got much [international media coverage in May of 2019](#), along with the now-famous and viral photos of Everest climbers waiting in line below the summit.

Rarely, however, has the issue of waste management in villages within the Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone (SNPBZ) and main trekking routes been part of the international dialogue or concern.

As tourist numbers continued to rise pre-Covid (more than 60,000 in 2019, not counting support staff) unsightly and unhealthy landfills have become a common sight near villages and lodges. A recent study by the Sagarmatha Next project reported that as of the 2017 sampling season, there were 58 active open landfill pits within the SNPBZ (*Figure 1*).

[Read the full article here.](#)

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*Featured image: Typical garbage pit outside of a village, usually out of sight of the main trekking trail. Landfills are particularly problematic in the alpine zone above 4,000m, where decomposition processes*

are much slower than those at lower, warmer and more humid environments. Photo: ALTON C BYERS

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