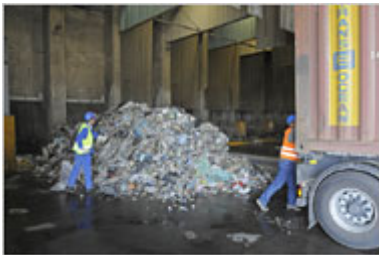


By ELISABETH ROSENTHAL
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HAMBURG, [Germany](#) — Naples' garbage — the plastic Ferrarelle water bottles, the soggy copies of Internazionale magazine, the decomposing kitchen compost — has ended up here, waiting to be dumped into an incinerator on the outskirts of this tidy German city.

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Urs Kluyver for The International Herald Tribune

Trash from Naples arriving by truck at a waste treatment plant in Hamburg, Germany. The daily shipments, which are a temporary measure, start with a 44-hour trip on a 56-car train.

For months, mountains of rotting trash have grown in the streets of southern [Italy](#) because the region has run out of places to put it. So for the time being — 11 weeks, actually — a 56-car train will arrive in Hamburg every day after a 44-hour journey, each bearing 700 tons of Neapolitan refuse.

“We are doing this because we were asked to provide emergency aid, but we will do it only for a few months, not years,” said Martin Mineur, the director of two of Hamburg’s incinerators, as a steady stream of trucks carrying garbage from the train station roared by. “This is not a long-term solution. Italy will have to solve Italy’s problem.”

But Italy’s problem has echoes in all of Europe, where Naples looks increasingly like a foul-smelling version of an untenable past, and Hamburg its future. Despite population growth, Hamburg produces less garbage today than it did almost a decade ago. What it does

generate is either recycled or removed to high-tech, low-polluting incinerators.

Outside Naples, Europe's trash may not yet be overflowing in the streets. But across the Continent, longstanding landfill sites are filling up quickly, and in Europe's small spaces there is little room for new ones. The problem has made it imperative for European nations to cut their waste.

By 2020, the [European Union](#) will require member nations to reduce the amount of trash sent to landfills to 35 percent of what it was in 1995. It has already begun severely restricting and reducing the use of landfills, aka garbage dumps, because of the host of health and environmental problems they produce.

But none of this will be easy. Italy, Spain, Greece and Britain each still send more than 60 percent of their garbage to landfills. A recent study found that they, as well as Ireland and France, are unlikely to meet those long-term landfill targets.

(In 2006, the United States sent 55 percent of its waste to landfills, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).)

“Look, no one wants waste — you want to ignore it, or throw it away, or have huge piles of it out of sight in landfill as they do in Britain,” said Barbara Helferrich, a spokeswoman for the [European Commission](#) Environment Directorate. “It's a difficult problem, but some countries are definitely much better than others in waste management.”

It is perhaps not surprising that Hamburg should take the lead. It is governed by the German [Green Party](#). On the street, pedestrians are required to divide trash into four types of bins, depending on its recycling potential.

Germany and a few northern European countries have spent most of the last decade developing strategies to reduce and dispose of the

waste generated by modern life: closing polluting landfills and investing heavily in recycling and trash reduction programs.

For the trash that remains, they have developed state-of-the-art incinerators that minimize noxious emissions with a series of filters and have put the energy generated to good use, by heating homes and water, for example.

But incinerators take at least four years to build, officials here say. Getting permits and planning permission to deal with a smelly, undesirable problem often takes longer. For instance, although German officials agreed in February to take trash from Naples, it took months to get permission for trash trains from Naples to cross Austria.

On Thursday, the trash transfer program was briefly suspended after Hamburg officials found a small amount of radioactive medical waste in one of the railroad cars; Italian officials promised better monitoring.

But a number of countries have trash problems that will not wait.

“We have described the U.K. as the dustbin of Europe because we put more to landfill than any other country in the E.U., and our landfill space is running out very quickly,” said Nick Mann of the British Local Government Association. Waste in Britain is increasing 3 percent a year, and its dumps will be filled to capacity in nine years.

Mr. Mann said: “A large percentage of our calls are about trash. There’s a front-page story on bins almost every day. Trash is a really hot issue.”

Unfortunately, public concern about trash does not translate to solutions, Ms. Helferrich said. Those depend more on the structure of government, management expertise and national priorities.