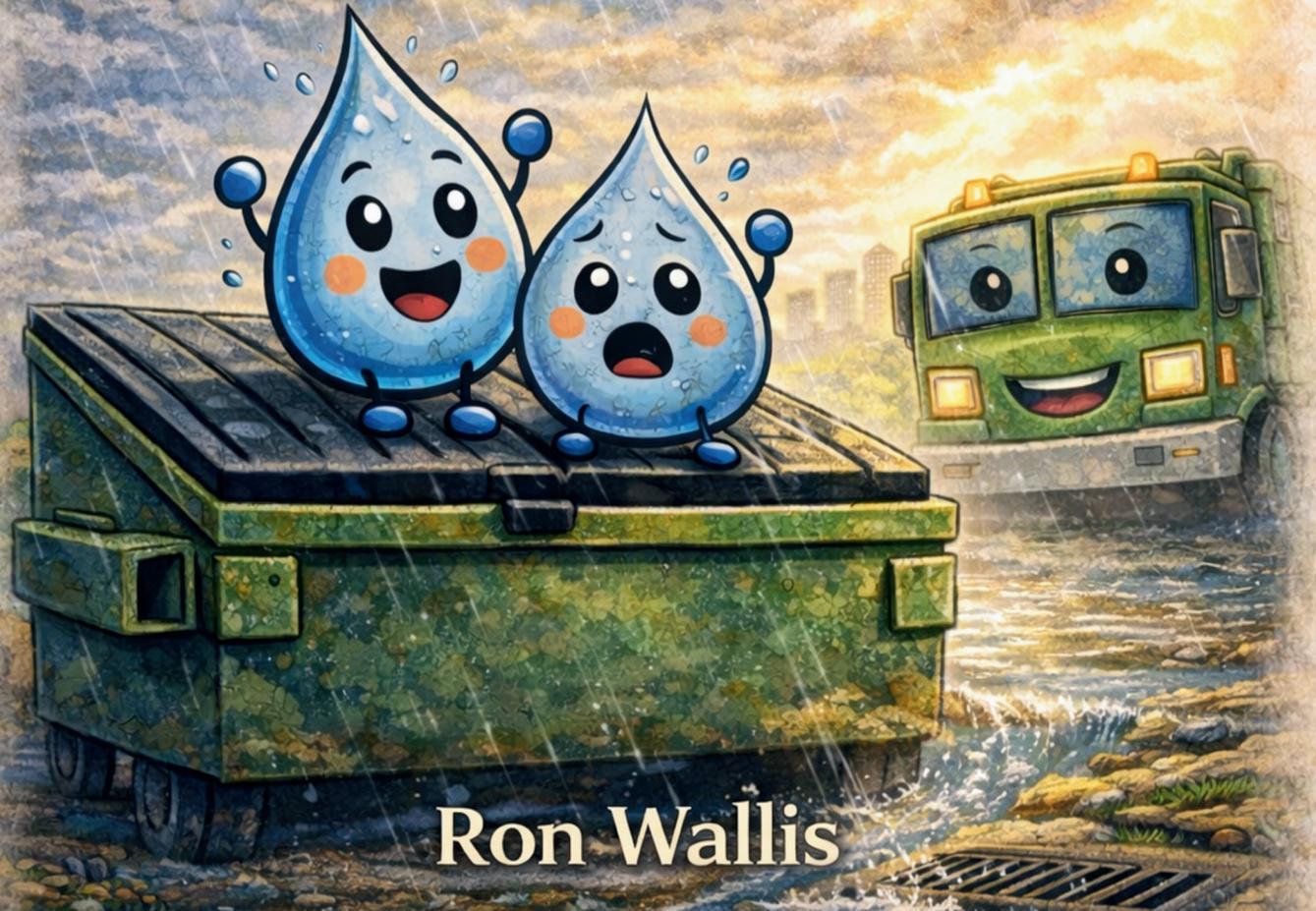


The Hidden Life of Wet Waste

Two Raindrops. One Dumpster.
One Big Lesson.

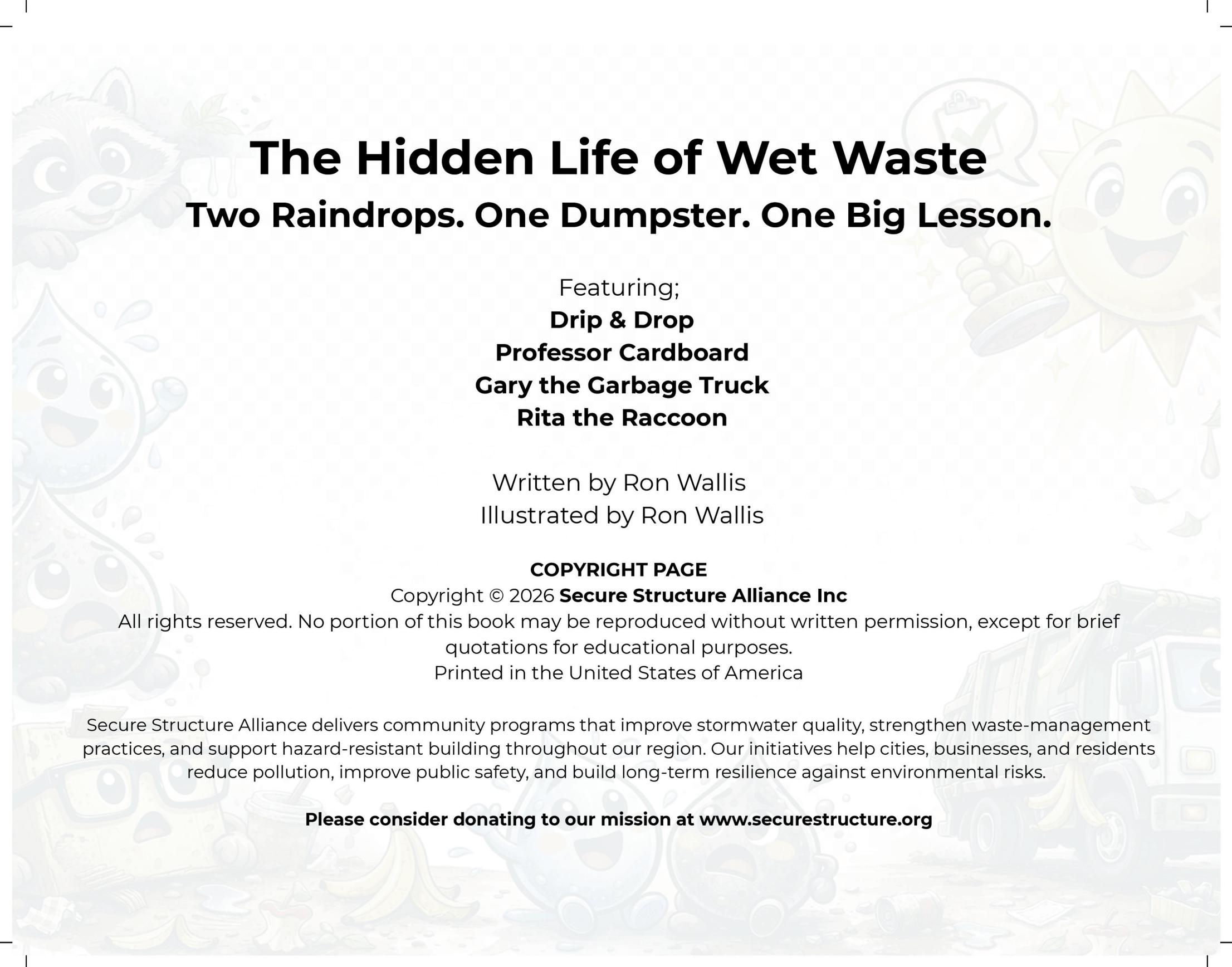


Ron Wallis



**A Story About Small Habits
That Make a Big Difference**

An Environmental Storybook



The Hidden Life of Wet Waste

Two Raindrops. One Dumpster. One Big Lesson.

Featuring;
Drip & Drop
Professor Cardboard
Gary the Garbage Truck
Rita the Raccoon

Written by Ron Wallis
Illustrated by Ron Wallis

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Secure Structure Alliance delivers community programs that improve stormwater quality, strengthen waste-management practices, and support hazard-resistant building throughout our region. Our initiatives help cities, businesses, and residents reduce pollution, improve public safety, and build long-term resilience against environmental risks.

Please consider donating to our mission at www.securestructure.org

Dedicated to the
next generation
of watershed protectors —
the ones who remember
to close the lid.



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Chapter 1

Cloud Launch Day

Maybe a lake!
Maybe a leaf!



Every landing is
scientifically important.

SPLASH!

Perfect landing!



Cloud Launch Day

High above the city, inside a rumbling gray cloud,
two raindrops bounced excitedly.

Drip stretched.

“I hope I land somewhere awesome! Maybe a lake! Maybe a leaf!”

Drip adjusted his imaginary science goggles.

“Every landing is scientifically important.”

“You say that every storm,” Drip laughed.

“Because it’s true,” Drip replied proudly. “We’re part of the water cycle.”

The wind gusted.

“Three... two... one... SPLASH!”

They fell.

Drip landed on a closed dumpster lid and slid down
like it was a shiny metal slide.

“Perfect landing!” Drip cheered.

Drip landed on a lid that was cracked open just a little.

He froze.

“Why do I smell... pizza?”

And slipped inside.



≡ Chapter 2 ≡

Enter Professor Cardboard

I am Professor Cardboard.
Currently dry,
Let us keep it that way.

This is unacceptable
moisture infusion!

Leachate. Water
that has mixed with
trash and picked up
ickee contaminants.



Leachate— what?

Leachate. Water that has mixed
with trash and picked up **contaminants.**

It is, the Professor.

Enter Professor Cardboard

Inside the dumpster, Drop landed on a stack of boxes.

One box slowly lifted its flap like a professor adjusting glasses.

“Ahem. I am Professor Cardboard,” the box announced.

“Currently dry. Let us keep it that way.”

More rain fell inside.

Water pooled.

Professor Cardboard stiffened.

“This is unacceptable moisture intrusion!”

Drop rolled across soggy napkins and bumped into a soda cup.

“I feel different,” Drop said. “Heavier.”

“You are becoming leachate,” Professor Cardboard explained.

“Leacha-what?” Drop mumbled.

“Leachate. Water that has mixed with trash and picked up contaminants.”

Drop gulped.

“That sounds... complicated.”

“It is,” the Professor sighed.



> Chapter 3 <
Drip's Easy Slide



Still just rain!

Everything's contained over here!
Drip looked back: "Everything's" contained over here!



Drip's Easy Slide

Meanwhile, Drip slid safely down the outside of the dumpster and landed on the pavement.

"Still just rain!" Drip said proudly.

He joined other raindrops flowing toward a storm drain.

Inside the dumpster, trash stayed mostly dry.

Cardboard boxes stood tall.

Paper bags held their shape.

Drip looked back.

"Everything's contained over here!"



> Chapter 4 <

Rita Smells Opportunity

“Ooooh,” she sniffed.
That’s the smell of a
a wet dumpster.”

Hi.



Moisture accelerates
decomposition.



Rita grinned, popping her head over the
edge. **Drop** gulped.





Rita Smells Opportunity

Behind the dumpster, Rita the Raccoon lifted her nose. “Ooooh,” she sniffed. “That’s the smell of a wet dumpster.”

Inside, bacteria cheered.
“Water party!”

Professor Cardboard sagged dramatically.
“Moisture accelerates decomposition.”

“That means stronger smells,” Drop said nervously.

“And more raccoons,” Rita grinned, popping her head over the edge.

“Hi.”
Drop gulped.



> Chapter 5 <

The Pavement Problem

You don't look sparkly anymore.

I mixed with trash.

They just move it!

Storm drains don't clean **water!**

Drip shouted.





The Pavement Problem

Water began dripping from a small gap in the dumpster.

“That’s me…” Drop whispered.

He slid down and landed on the concrete, leaving a dark streak.

Drip saw him moving toward the storm drain.

“You don’t look sparkly anymore,” Drip said gently.

“I mixed with trash,” Drop admitted.

Rain pushed the streak forward.

“Storm drains don’t clean water!” Drip shouted.

“They just move it!” Drop replied.



≡ Chapter 6 ≡

Recycling Trouble

I ruined recycling?

"I once held important books,"
he said sadly. "Now I am
pulp."



Moisture weakens paper
fibers."

Wet cardboard
often cannot be
recycled.



Dry cardboard stays stronger.



Recycling Trouble

Professor Cardboard tried to stand tall but slumped again.

“I once held important books,” he said sadly. “Now I am pulp.”

Drop blinked. “I ruined recycling?”

“Moisture weakens paper fibers,” the Professor explained.

“Wet cardboard cannot be recycled.”

Drip nodded thoughtfully from the pavement.

“Dry cardboard stays stronger.”



Chapter 7

Gary Arrives

Name's Gary," he said. "Gary the Garbage Truck."

"This load is **heavier** than it needs to be."

Water adds **weight**.

And more weight means **more fuel**,

And more **fuel** means more **emissions**.





Gary the Garbage Truck Arrives



A large truck rumbled into the lot.

“Name’s Gary,” he said. “Gary the Garbage Truck.”

He lifted the dumpster.

Dry trash fell in solid pieces.

Wet trash slumped heavily.

“This load is heavier than it needs to be,” Gary grumbled.

“Water adds weight,” Drip explained.

“And more weight means more fuel,” Drop added.

“And more fuel means more emissions,” Gary finished.



≡ Chapter 8 ≡

The Landfill Lesson

Name's Gary," he said. "Gary the Garbage Truck."



Modern landfills use **liners** and **pipes** to collect **leachate**. And **gas wells** to capture **methane**.

"**Extra moisture** can increase **leachate** and **methane** production."

Landfills are designed to **manage water**," Gary added, "but **unnecessary water** makes the system work **harder**."



The Landfill Lesson



At the landfill, Drip and Drop reunited.

“This place is huge!” Drip said.

“It’s engineered,” Professor Cardboard explained weakly.

Gary nodded.

“Modern landfills use liners and pipes to collect leachate.”

“And gas wells to capture methane,” the Professor added.

Drop looked worried.

“Did I make things worse?”

“Extra moisture can increase leachate and methane production,”
Professor Cardboard said gently.

“Landfills are designed to manage water,” Gary added,
“but unnecessary water makes the system work harder.”



Chapter 9

A Long Responsibility

Workers monitored groundwater wells.

Pipes collected contaminated liquid.

Gas systems hummed quietly.



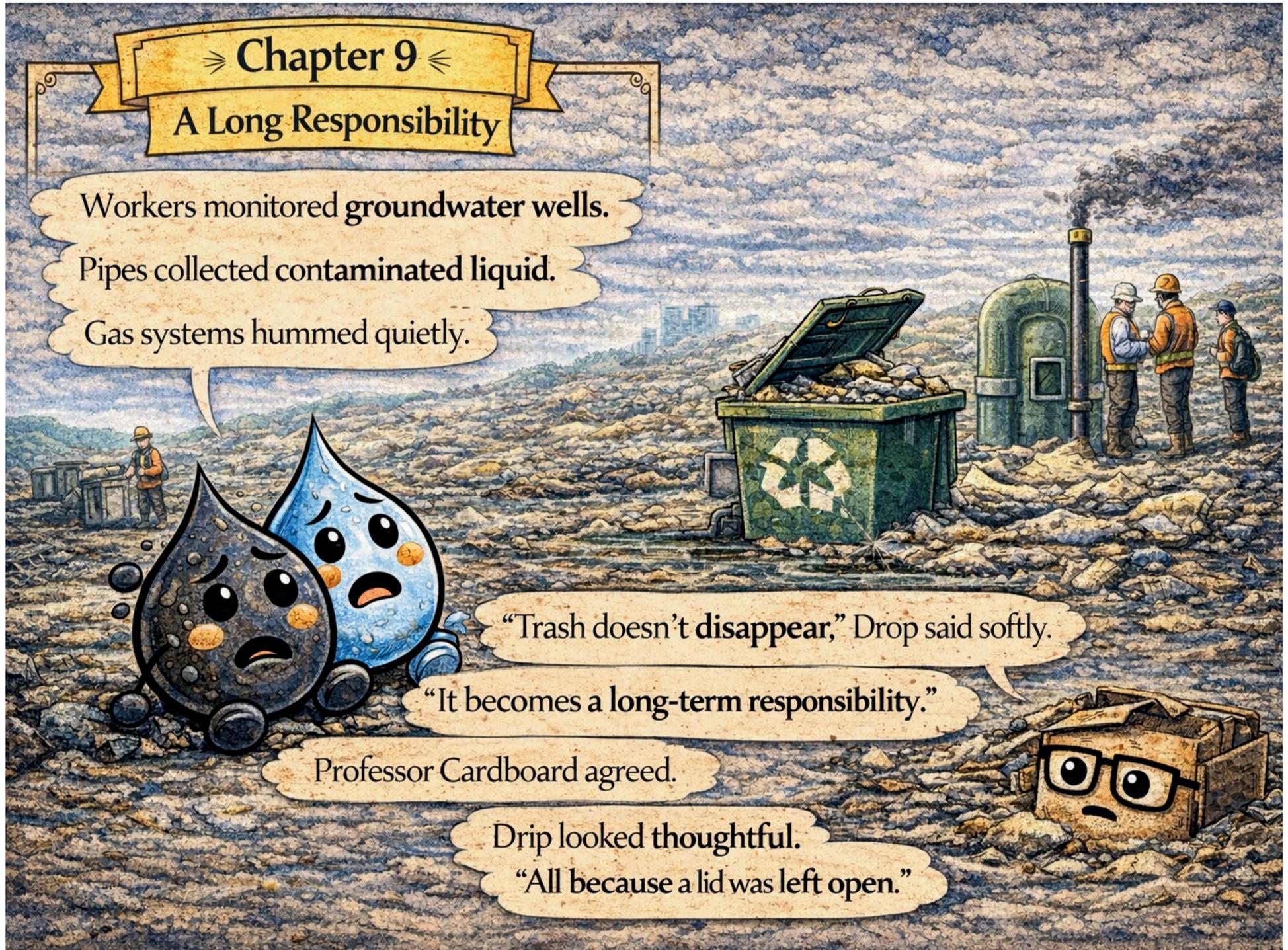
“Trash doesn’t disappear,” Drop said softly.

“It becomes a long-term responsibility.”

Professor Cardboard agreed.

Drip looked thoughtful.

“All because a lid was left open.”





A Long Responsibility

Workers monitored groundwater wells.

Pipes collected contaminated liquid.

Gas systems hummed quietly.

“Trash doesn’t disappear,” Drop said softly.

“It becomes a long-term responsibility,” Professor Cardboard agreed.

Drip looked thoughtful.

“All because a lid was left open.”



Chapter 10

The Big Realization

What changed everything?" Drop asked.

Drop didn't hesitate. "The lid."

Gary honked. "Keep it dry."

Rita called out, "Close the lid, humans!"

Wet waste moves.

Together said:

"And small habits protect
big watersheds."



The Big Realization

The storm passed.
The sun came out.



Drip and Drop slowly evaporated and rose back into the sky.

“What changed everything?” Drip asked.

Drop didn’t hesitate.
“The lid.”

Professor Cardboard added, “Prevention begins at the source.”

Gary honked. “Keep it dry.”

Rita called out, “Close the lid, humans!”

Drip smiled at the readers.
“Dry waste stays contained.”

Drop nodded.
“Wet waste moves.”
Together they said:
“And small habits protect big watersheds.”



Quick Facts to Remember

- Rain that stays outside trash remains **stormwater**.
- 💧 Rain that mixes with trash becomes **leachate**.
- 🗑️ Leachate can reach **storm drains**.
- 🌊 Storm drains often lead directly to **waterways**.
- ✔️ Keeping lids closed protects recycling, reduces pollution, and lowers environment impact.



Close the lid.
Keep trash dry.
Protect your watershed.

Because the best time to stop pollution...
...is before rain mixes with trash.



Glossary of Terms

Stormwater

Rain that flows over land, streets, rooftops, and parking lots. In many cities, stormwater goes directly into storm drains and flows to rivers, lakes, or oceans without being cleaned.

Leachate

Liquid that forms when water mixes with trash and picks up contaminants like food residue, bacteria, oils, or chemicals.

Contamination

When unwanted substances (like food or liquids) mix into materials that could otherwise be recycled.

Recycling

The process of turning used materials (like paper, cardboard, metal, or plastic) into new products instead of sending them to a landfill.

Landfill

A carefully engineered site where trash is buried. Modern landfills use liners, pipes, and monitoring systems to protect soil and groundwater.

Decomposition

The natural process of breaking down organic materials (like food or paper) by bacteria and microorganisms

Bacteria

Microscopic living organisms that help break down waste. They grow faster when moisture is present.

Methane

A greenhouse gas produced when organic waste breaks down without oxygen in a landfill.

Greenhouse Gas

A gas that traps heat in Earth's atmosphere. Methane and carbon dioxide are examples.

Emissions

Gases released into the air from vehicles, machines, or industrial processes.

Disposal by Weight

Many landfills charge by the ton. When trash is wet, it weighs more and costs more to haul and dispose of.

Watershed

An area of land where all rain and water drain into the same river, lake, or ocean.

Landfill Liner

A protective barrier (usually made of clay and synthetic materials) placed at the bottom of a landfill to prevent contamination from leaking into groundwater.

Source Control

Stopping pollution before it starts — for example, keeping dumpster lids closed to prevent rain from mixing with trash.



Did You Know?



Approved



Stormwater is rain that flows over land and pavement. In many cities, it goes directly to rivers and oceans without being cleaned first.



Did You Know?



Yikes!



Leachate forms when water mixes with waste and **dissolves** things like **food residue, bacteria, oils, chemicals.** It is, the **Professor.**



Did You Know?



Everything's dry!



Keeping trash dry helps prevent contamination from spreading into stormwater systems.



Did You Know?



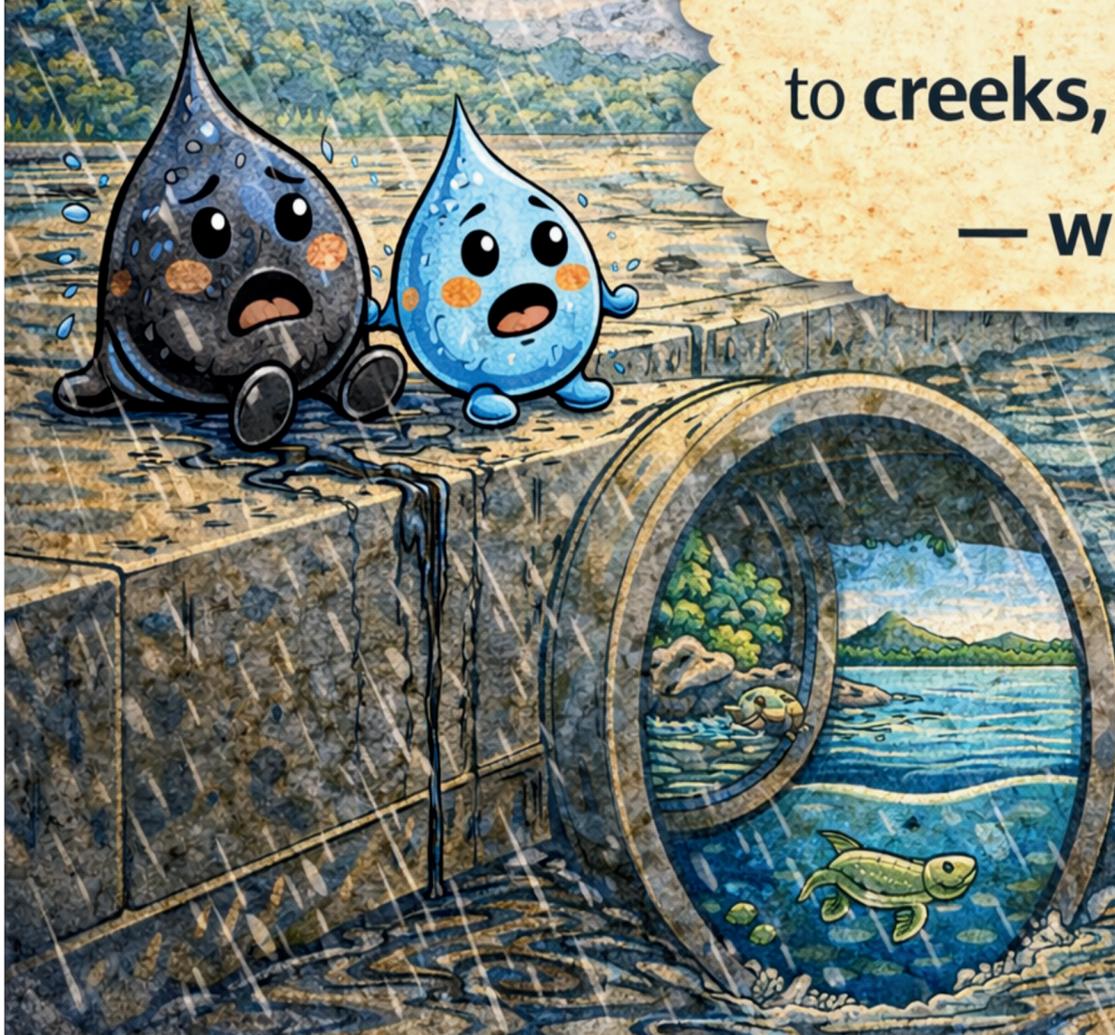
Wet waste breaks down and produces **stronger odors**, which attract pests like **raccoons** and **flies**.



Did You Know?



Storm drains usually carry water directly to **creeks, rivers, lakes, or oceans** — **without treatment.**





Did You Know?

Approved



Wet cardboard often **cannot be recycled** because the fibers **break down** and **contamination spreads** through the load.





Did You Know?



Trash disposal is often charged by weight. Wet trash costs more to haul and dispose of. It also creates the **greenhouse effect** and speeds up damage to our city streets.

greenhouse effect





Did You Know?

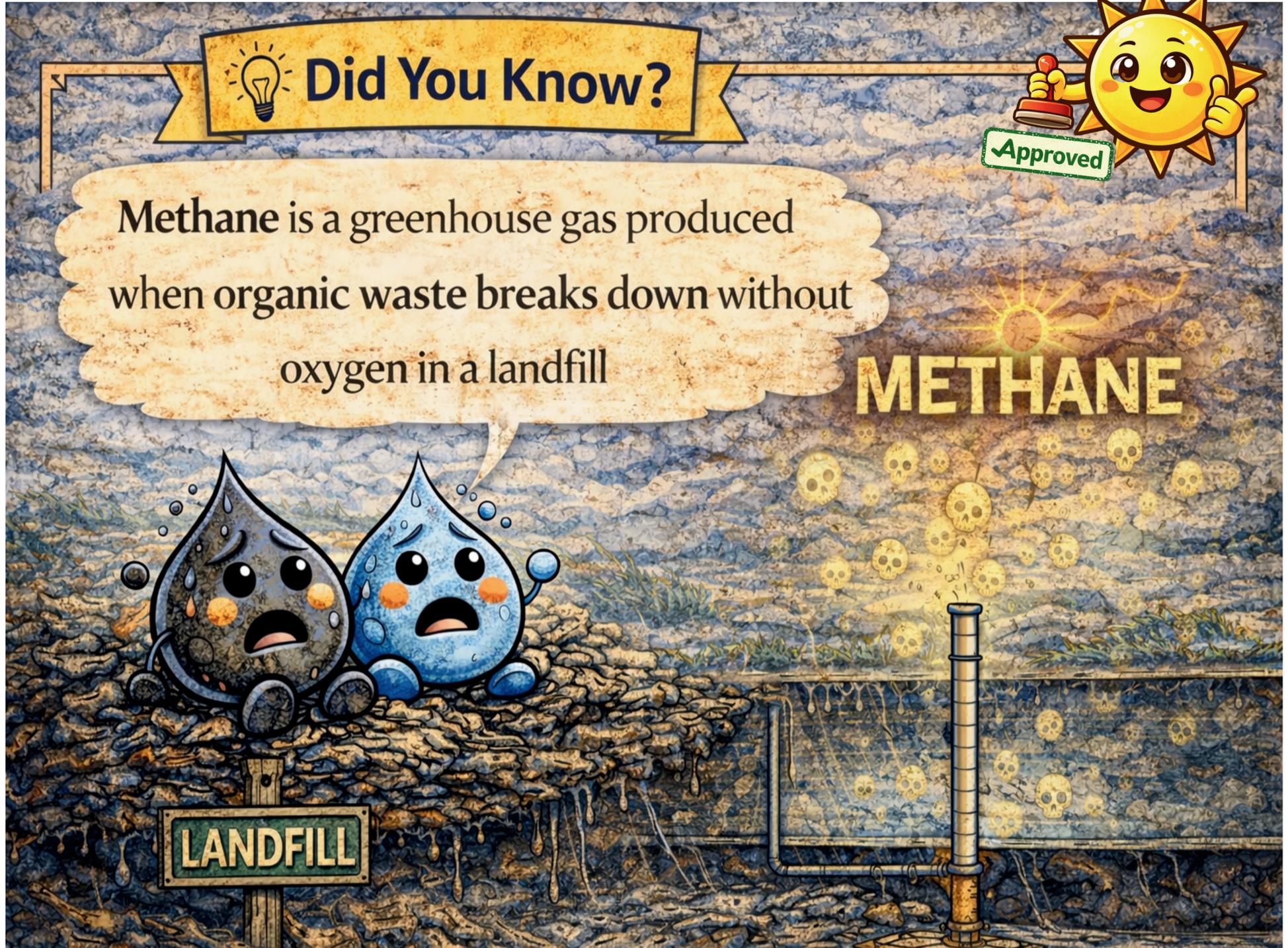
Approved

Methane is a greenhouse gas produced when organic waste breaks down without oxygen in a landfill

METHANE



LANDFILL





Did You Know?



Landfills are monitored for decades to protect groundwater and manage gas and leachate.





Our Mission

Our mission is to protect communities by improving stormwater quality, strengthening waste-management practices, and advancing hazard-resistant building solutions.

Through education, outreach, and collaborative public-private programs, we help cities, businesses and residents reduce pollution, enhance public safety, and build cleaner, more resilient neighborhoods.



Our Vision

We envision communities where clean waterways, responsible waste systems, and hazard-resistant infrastructure work together to create safer, healthier, and more sustainable cities for generations to come.

Our goal is to empower people, partners, and municipalities, with the knowledge, tools, and innovative solutions needed to support long-term environmental resilience and public well-being.

Please consider donating to our mission at www.securestructure.org