

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SANITATION

Today, we know that sanitation makes a tremendous contribution to preventing disease and keeping people healthy.

But it wasn't always that way. Throughout most of our history, sanitation practices were practically nonexistent. Yet the history of sanitation dates back at least 7,000 years, to the Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.

7,000 YEARS AGO

The Babylonians discovered that contaminated water could cause disease. They brought in fresh water every day.

2,000 YEARS AGO

The physician Hippocrates discovered that cleansing could prevent infection.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Made great progress in the area of sanitation.

Built aqueducts to bring in fresh water, and built sewer systems and public baths.

However, with the fall of the Roman Empire, much of the knowledge the Romans developed was lost, and was not passed on.

MEDIEVAL TIMES

Were truly the Dark Ages as far as sanitation was concerned.

Towns were dirty and crowded, and disease and epidemics spread unchecked because of the lack of sanitation.

Water was contaminated, and personal hygiene was virtually unknown.

Tuberculosis, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, yellow fever, all were rampant.

As many children died as lived, and the average life span was under 30 years.

The worst epidemic during this period was the Black Death, from 1438-1441, which spread to such proportions that 60 million people died, which at the time was one-fourth the population of the world.

19TH. CENTURY

In New York City, living conditions were as nearly as filthy as in the middle ages, and yearly epidemics swept through populations, killing many.

The average life span was less than age 40.

But during the mid 1800's, it was discovered between germs and disease was proven.

Soaps, disinfectants, and pharmaceuticals began to be developed, and it was first recognized that disease could be controlled.

This began the Sanitation Revolution, and public health practices such as garbage collection, water treatment, public health departments and regulations, as well as personal bathing, became part of the culture.

The death rate in children dropped, and the average life span increased over the years, to age 74.