



Rethink the Way We Recycle

Do you ever think about what happens to your trash after you throw it away? What about after the garbage man picks it up? There are a lot of people who could care less about what happens to plastic or other recyclable materials once they discard them into the trash. This is a problem. The way we think about recycling needs to be reprogrammed into our everyday life. This paper will discuss the advantages and differences between reducing raw material, reusing something old to give it a new purpose and recycling already used materials through a series of changes or treatments to make new materials or objects.

Although recycling seems like a new concept, you can trace it back thousands of years. Prior to the industrial period, things were not made quickly or cheaply, and recycling programs were hard to find. Recycling was predominantly practiced at home to save families money. During the 1930's and 1940's times were hard, and people could not afford to purchase new goods. As a result reusing and recycling became an important part of society. Although plastic was invented in England in 1856 it wasn't until the 1960's that people started to believe that it was being used excessively. During this period, environmental groups began stressing the importance of recycling. The biggest concern for recycling came along when the culture of "disposable" goods became the norm. During the 1980's there was a peak in the excessive amount of garbage being thrown away and dumped into landfills. Which was when the government began passing more laws to make recycling a greater priority. This is also when the concept of reducing, reusing and recycling otherwise known as the three R's was created.

Reducing is when you limit the amount of waste you produce in the first place. Making a new product requires a lot of raw materials which are taken from the earth. As a result, a reduction of the materials is the greatest way to save natural resources. There are lots of ways to do this. You can buy products that are not wrapped in layers of plastic. You can also borrow items you only plan on using once instead of buying an item for a one-time use. In an article titled The Problem with Plastic the author states "EDN has built a multi-year campaign to end plastic pollution with multiple goals, which include to end the production of single-use plastic products, promoting alternative materials 100 percent plastic recycling, corporate and government accountability, and changing human behavior around the use of plastic" (Abdul Hamid). A fantastic way to begin reducing would be to stop drinking out of plastic bottles, cups and straws. You can begin drink

from reusable bottles or cups and use paper straws instead of plastic straws. Consumer awareness plays an important part of the reducing process.

What's the point in reusing? Reusing prevents waste from going to landfills, improves our communities, increases materials, and consumes less energy than recycling. Reusing is also free! If you must use plastic cups or bottles to drink from, simply wash them, refill them and drink from them again. Even disposable plastic cups should last you a very long time. You can also, bring reusable sacks to the grocery store to use instead of taking home new plastic bags every time you purchase something new. Another reusable idea is to take coffee cans, shoeboxes and plastic food containers and use them as storage containers. Lastly, you can simply donate your old clothes, toys, furniture and other items you no longer want to local homeless shelters. There are hundreds of ways you can reuse or donate unwanted items to make them usable again. The most important question to ask yourself before discarding an unwanted item is - Can this item be handed down or reused to for another purpose?

So, why should we recycle at all? For one reason, it saves energy. "According to the Environmental Protection Agency, recycling aluminum cans saves ninety-five percent of the energy needed to make new ones from raw materials and; The energy saved from recycling one glass bottle will operate a one hundred-watt light bulb for four hours" (Howard). Recycling is not the same as reusing. You can only recycle things which have raw materials. Because of this, recycling is often a confusing concept to people. In the beginning, recycling had strict sorting rules which made it harder to understand what could and could not recycle. As time passed all those rules have been revamped and no longer apply. According to the article Get Ready to Pay More for Curbside Recycling, "Single-stream recycling is easier for consumers" (Orr). Single-stream is when paper, glass, plastic and metal are mingled in blue boxes and picked up together at the same

time and separated at the recycling center. This process is a less confusing then when people were having to separate the items at home. It also has helped make people more likely to try recycling. Plastic is one of the most used materials that can be recycled. Recycling plastic is critical to the earths' environment because plastic is everywhere, and it is not biodegradable. Because plastic lasts forever and is used in a variety of diverse ways, overtime it gets pushed, blown or just thrown around and is finding its way into our oceans. This is having many different effects. One author points out that "Plastic is finding its way into our food and in a few decades our oceans could contain more plastic than fish" (Hamid). This is a huge concern to everyone and the time to make changes is now.

Why are so many people against recycling? Because if recycling were mandatory, cities would need facilities to process recyclable goods, collect recyclable goods, transport collectable goods to the centers, money to build the centers and money to hire people to work at the facility. To make mandatory recycling profitable, cities will need to do something with the recycled material. Basically, people are still under the myth that it cost more money to recycle than to simply throw trash away. Recycling initially was a costly thing. However, it has evolved. What if instead of recycling centers costing cities money, it made cities money? That is exactly what a well-managed recycling center can do. According to the article Silver Lining to Giant Load of Rubbish, "Green-Friendly micro-factories can reduce landfills, create jobs, provide business opportunities and boost our declining manufacturing sector – but the technology needs the government to support it, and businesses to use it" (Sahjwalla). Recycling centers should be a no brainer even if you live in a city that does not have a mandatory recycling program. Recycling should just be a part of your everyday life. Saving your empty cans and bottles and recycling them

on your own will not only help the environment, it will also put a little extra money in your pocket. Recycling is a win, win no matter how you look at it.

Waste and how we handle it affects our world and environment. By now, you should understand that you need things like clean air to breath, water to drink and fish without plastic to eat. It is so important to understand why an effective environment is important to have. The waste we create needs to be controlled to ensure the that we do not harm our environment or our health. I agree with Chaz Miller when he wrote “Let’s start taking a closer look at the purpose of recycling. Let’s put more emphasis on protecting the environment. Let’s figure out what recycling can realistically achieve and how. Then let’s go out and do it” (Miller).

This paper discussed the advantages and disadvantages of recycling and differences between the three R’s of recycling. We learned about reducing waste and ways we can reduce waste in our lives. We learned about why it is important to reuse items we no longer want or need in our lives. We also learned about how giving unwanted items to the less fortunate can be beneficial to our cities and to the environment. We learned about ways to recycle and how recycling is a win, win for everyone involved. Most importantly, we learned that the way we think about think about the way we recycle needs to be changed. Many people criticize recycling before knowing the facts which hurts the overall image of recycling. Recycling helps the environment but also helps the economy. Recycling provides numerous benefits to the environment and to the society.

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