

## Recycling is a Must

*by Jonah Saunders*

The simple act of recycling has many environmental and economic benefits; therefore, it should be encouraged in the United States. When materials such as paper and plastic are recycled, they are essentially reused. This reusing of materials allows people to obtain the same product they would have if it were brand new, except minimal extra materials and resources had to be used to make that product. With this simple explanation, it is easy to see why recycling is so important if people want to continue to use the earth like they have been for as long as humankind has existed. Just like spending money, or putting money back into the system, helps fuel the economy, recycling allows materials to be put back into production to help increase productivity. Recycling is basically becoming another available resource for people to use, and the great thing about this resource is that it will never run out. Recycling will always be something that society can use to benefit itself.

In Sati Manrich and Amelia S. F. Santos' book, *Plastic Recycling*, a number of facts about the process of plastics recycling are explained. An average family produces about three pounds of garbage daily. Plastic is one of the most common recyclable materials that are frequently thrown away. "Plastic became a huge manufacturing product in the 1940's when it was discovered that it could be produced efficiently, using less energy and natural resources" (Manrich and Santos 3). While it is an exceptionally great product for the everyday consumer, if not disposed of properly, it can be terrible for the environment because it is not very biodegradable at all. With the growing demand for plastic and other environmentally harmful

products, more and more of it is being put into landfills or even just thrown on the ground anywhere. These careless acts have to be slowed down if the earth is to remain alive and healthy. Luckily, there are already things being done to slow down the amount of waste produced in the United States. “Many methods are being used just for that reason, including the taxation of the usage of non-recyclable packaging materials and the actual required use of recycled materials in some manufacturing companies” (Manrich and Santos 4). Now, just because the materials are recyclable doesn’t mean that they will be recycled; thus, it is the consumers’ responsibility to make sure that this does indeed happen.

Recycling boosts the economy by creating jobs. More than one million jobs have been created throughout the United States by the recycling industry, “a figure that is expected to double as the demand for recycled materials continues to grow in the industrial and agricultural sectors” (Seldman par. 2). For example, there are companies that have started recycling and refurbishing mattresses, such as a company in Connecticut that started up operations in the year 2012. There, only twenty workers can process 100,000 mattresses every year. Mattresses are large and a lot of them together will take up a pretty good amount of space in a landfill, so refurbishing and eventually reusing them will help a lot in saving landfill space. Just imagine how many mattresses can be recycled if more businesses such as this one begin to start up around the country. A recycling program in Reading, Pennsylvania is expecting to save the city hundreds of thousands of dollars with its newly created jobs. “Reading will be the site of the first U.S. plant that uses 40 tons per day of recycled high grade paper and recycled cotton to produce stationery, copy paper, envelopes and file folders for local regional markets” (Seldman par. 7).

This means that 40 tons of what some people consider waste will be saved from going into landfills every day. With all of this material being recycled and the city actually saving a large amount of money from it, it is easy to see how beneficial programs such as this one actually are. It doesn't stop there; there are many companies and programs popping up around the country that utilize similar recycling techniques, thus putting the country on its way to becoming cleaner and more efficient.

One argument against the need for recycling is that there is currently plenty of room for waste in landfills and that recycling is simply a waste of time. “[I]t is simply untrue that landfill space is filling; there is currently plenty of room for the waste” (Decker par. 1). Anybody who says this is not aware of what could happen in the future, or is aware and just not taking it into consideration. Notice how the quoted line says the word “currently.” Currently, it is true; there is plenty of room in landfills. With that being said, wouldn't it be great to save that space so that this statement will always be true? While the availability of landfills may not be a huge problem right now, if people don't adjust their habits of producing excessive amounts of trash today, then the United States will definitely run into a problem with landfill space in years to come.

So what? Why are landfills so bad in the first place? Well one big problem landfills pose on the environment is that “they produce harmful emissions, as well as put surface and groundwater supplies in danger. This is why 10,000 of them have been shut down in the last fifteen years” (“Recycling” 133). Shutting down certain landfills really is not good for the country as a whole because it just means another landfill has to be built or the trash in that area has to be sent to another landfill somewhere else. Fresh Kills is the name of a landfill located in

New York on Staten Island. It is said to be the tallest hill on the whole Eastern Seaboard, and it is not a pretty one. “100 feet deep for four square miles, this landfill contains roughly 2.9 billion cubic feet of garbage and is the largest landfill in the world” (Hawken 44). With this landfill as big as it is, “surprisingly only .02 percent of America’s waste is dumped here while thousands of times more trash is dumped in other landfills around the United States” (Hawken 44). The largest landfill in the whole country only takes in .02 percent of the country’s total waste! That means an enormous amount of waste is produced in the United States and if more people start to recycle as much as possible, the growth of this waste will begin to slow. The importance of recycling cannot be shown any better than that statistic does.

It is upsetting to see the endless statistics on the amount of material wasted and thrown away by Americans and how harmful it can be to the environment. “Disposing of roughly 210 million tons of municipal waste annually with a cost of around 45 billion dollars, the United States produces more waste than any other country in the world” (Martin par. 5). That amount of trash doesn’t even include the amount of litter people create by just throwing their trash on the ground wherever they want. “Every day, U.S. businesses generate enough paper to circle the earth 20 times” (Martin par. 31). Hopefully some of that paper is being recycled, but nonetheless, that is a huge amount of paper. These are just a slight few of the endless statistics concerning the amount of trash produced in the United States.

There are many materials that can and should be recycled as much as possible. Glass is one of these materials and it can be recycled rather easily. “Recycled glass can replace 95 percent of the raw materials needed to make new glass” (Poncavage 66). This means that only a

slight amount of extra materials is needed to recycle glass, making the process very efficient. “When just ten glass containers are recycled, enough energy is saved to operate a television for over two hours” (Poncavage 66). Energy is used quite often in the United States, so saving a large amount of it for other uses is very helpful and should be practiced more. Metals can also be recycled very efficiently. Aluminum cans, for example, when recycled, are used quite often to make new aluminum cans. Making aluminum cans from scratch uses a lot of energy, but when they are recycled to make new products, a whole ninety percent less energy is used than producing aluminum from scratch. “Recycling just six aluminum cans saves enough energy to power an air conditioner for one hour, or a laptop computer for 31 hours” (Poncavage 67). With all the excessive soda and beer drinkers in the country, that is a lot of cans that can be efficiently reused. Paper is used in large amounts every day in the United States. Try and think of one company that doesn’t use paper. “Every ton of recycled paper saves the energy-equivalent of 165 gallons of gasoline, or enough energy to power the average U.S. home for six months” (Poncavage 67). Recycling paper causes a great amount less air pollution and even less water pollution than producing it from scratch. Paper can actually be recycled up to seven different times before it has reached the end of its life. There are many other materials that can be recycled efficiently, so do some research and find out what can be done to help out.

Recycling doesn’t just mean throwing a recyclable material into a separate bin to be picked up by the local recycling center. There are many other methods of recycling that people may not think of very often. There are a lot of families who will sometimes save cups they use at fast food restaurants. Every time they save a cup they are essentially recycling that cup because it

is prevented from being thrown away and eventually ending up in a landfill. Using a method referred to as “upcycling” some people will use old materials from objects in their households to create new things instead of just throwing it all away. A group of young designers who call themselves the “Material Girls” use upcycling to create patchwork pillows from old pieces of cloth. They use their creative minds to reuse lots of materials to make unique new products. Projects such as these can easily be done with everyday household materials, so don’t hesitate to open up that creative side and go to work.

Recycling needs to be encouraged in the United States because of how beneficial it is to the Earth and to society. The Earth provides for its inhabitants, so why must people hurt it so willingly? The importance of recycling cannot be stressed enough. It is a resource that we as humans are able to use to our advantage in the fight to keep the planet alive and healthy for future generations to come. While finding space for trash may not be a huge problem right now, it can very easily become one in the near future. Not only does the act of recycling help the environment; it benefits the economy as well by creating numerous jobs around the country. So, stop throwing everything away and start recycling.

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