

Recycling

The United States produces more trash than any other country in the world. In 1993, the average U.S. citizen generated 4.4 pounds of trash each day, more than double the amount in 1963. During this time, the cost of new landfills has skyrocketed. Today, new landfills can cost up to \$500,000 per acre for design and construction. This expense is translated into additional fees or taxes for the community. There are also environmental costs involved with landfills. Many older landfills do not have the environmental safeguards of new facilities and all landfills have the potential to contaminate groundwater. Added to these costs is the difficulty in siting new landfills. “Not in my backyard,” or “NIMBY,” is a common protest in communities where landfills are proposed.

In response to these problems, many communities have initiated recycling programs. While landfills will always be necessary, the life of a landfill can be extended 20 to 24 years by meeting a recycling goal of just 20 percent. In addition to this, recycling conserves natural resources. For some industries, it is much cheaper and easier to use recycled material instead of processing new stock. Aluminum producers use 96 percent less energy by reprocessing recycled aluminum than by producing the same amount of metal from bauxite ore. Recycled oil can be re-refined and reused, reducing our country’s dependence on oil by thousands of barrels each day. Considering the costs and hassles involved with constructing new landfills and the benefits to industry, recycling does make a difference in everyone’s life.

Problems:

- # Fast-paced American society requires instant, throw-away, and individually packed products, increasing the volume of solid waste generated each year and reducing available landfill space.
- # With increasing population, there is a greater demand for limited natural resources.
- # Landfills are potentially a source for metals and toxics contamination of groundwater.
- # As the risks associated with landfills become more apparent, stricter environmental requirements for, and public resistance to, new landfills are increasing the cost of new facilities; a cost that is borne by each citizen.
- # Improper disposal of oil and antifreeze endangers water quality and wildlife, while wasting valuable natural resources.

Solutions:

- # Recycle at home and at work.
- # Buy fewer products. Purchase quality goods that will last longer.
- # Use reusable canvas or mesh bags when shopping.
- # Buy brands that have less packaging and/or that are packaged in recyclable materials.
- # Buy reusable items instead of disposable ones.
- # Buy items made from recycled materials.
- # Encourage companies to reduce packaging and product toxicity through product

Recycling

design and production.

- # Be creative--find new uses for old things.
- # Reduce yard waste by using a mulching lawnmower and composting leaves and trimmings.
- # Donate unwanted, usable items to a charity instead of throwing them out.
- # Use stained or damaged clothing as cleaning rags around the house or garage.
- # Repair, repaint, or refurbish broken or damaged machinery, appliances, and furniture instead of purchasing new ones.
- # Purchase items at yard sales, antique, thrift and consignment stores, and pawn shops.
- # Take used appliances, like stoves and refrigerators, to companies that recycle them.