Should We Recycle Materials or Shouldn’t We?

A lot of people around the world don’t realize the importance of recycling, as they think that recycling is a waste of time and effort. The problem is when each person says: “What will happen if I threw this plastic bottle in the trash bin instead of recycling it?” I would make no difference! I believe that not only is recycling an important issue, but it is also an easy process. All humans are responsible for keeping the earth as clean as possible. They are also responsible for taking a good care of what is provided by nature, knowing that the earth’s natural resources one day might be depleted. “We are causing global warming.”, Al Gore said in the introduction of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). So we should take a responsible action toward what we’ve caused or will cause. One of these actions is recycling. In this piece of writing I will explain the importance of recycling, then I will mention arguments proclaiming that recycling is an unnecessary process; moreover, it is a government issue and not an individual duty. Finally, arguments declaring the importance and simplicity of recycling will take place.

According to Environment Protection Agency (EPA), recycling has numerous benefits, which contribute to the environment and prevent pollution, some of which are: saving energy, decreasing emissions of greenhouse gases, conserving natural resources, and reducing the need for incineration and landfilling (EPA, 2010). In fact, the amount of
waste each person creates daily has almost doubled from 2.7 to 4.5 pounds between 1960 and 2008 (EPA, 2009). Recycling, reducing, and reusing can diminish this number. In addition, recycling results in not only environmental revenue, but also a multitude of financial and social returns (EPA, 2010).

Long ago people used to recycle every product spontaneously without even noticing. For example, stale bread was dried in the sun and given to cattle; torn clothes were used as dusters, and ash to bury excrements. Nowadays it is cheaper to buy new products and easier to get rid of old ones. People are harming the earth with out even noticing. They are consuming all the time, and products are almost always cheap and available. For example, a plastic bag is available everywhere and so cheap, or even valueless. People can get plenty of bags; yet get rid of it immediately after use because it is available by the next stop. In fact, this plastic bag is countless when measuring the amount of waste, but has a serious effect on the environment. This flying blue bag will travel from city to another, get a rest on a tree for months, and will end its journey somewhere either in drains, oceans, or simply in landfills; and “As they decompose, tiny toxic bits seep into soils...”, John Roach mentions in his article (Roach, 2003). This tiny bag is made of a non-biodegradable substance, which lives a long life if not recycled. “Once in the environment, it takes months to hundreds of years for plastic bags to breakdown.”, said Roach. According to the American Chemistry Council (ACC), more than 830 million pounds of bags and film were recycled nationwide in 2007, 25% more than the amount recycled in 2005 (ACC, 2009).

Several disapprovals to the recycling idea were attempted. John Tierney wrote an article in New York Times titled “Recycling is Garbage” claiming that
“Recycling may be the most wasteful activity in modern America” (1996, p.24). Tierney also says, “Yes, a lot of trees have been cut down to make today’s newspaper. But even more trees will probably be planted in their place, so why do we worry so much about recycling paper?” (1996, p.26). However, six years later he opposes himself: Recycling newspapers makes a certain amount of sense, because used newsprint often has economic value and people often have special bins for their newspapers anyway. But why clutter the city with bins for stuff that's less than worthless? The city pays extra to collect and dispose of the bottles and cans, and then 40 percent of the stuff ends up in landfills anyway. (Tierney, 2002)

As long as we, humans, have invented technologies that recycle used paper and make a virgin-quality paper out of it, do we need to cut down trees? Let's keep trees to help the environment. Let's keep them to filter the atmosphere and to digest emissions. Natural resources are not replaceable. Tierney agrees that natural resources are being depleted, but he thinks that recycling is wasting a great resource, which is human time. Indeed, the time spent in the recycling process is not a waste compared to the advantages and benefits of recycling.

The most confusing argument was that reported in 2007, proclaiming that recycling is a waste of time. The discussion was held in the UK, and hosted by the institute of ideas. Thomas Deichmann, a German investigative journalist and commentator and founder and editor-in-chief of Novo Magazine, described that all environmental acts were basically derived from political achievements. Moreover, he described that the whole issue during the past 18 years was to implant, in one’s brain, the idea of carrying the responsibility of damaging not only his/her life, but also the whole
earth by his/her bad behavior, by not sorting the garbage! (FOR A.tv, 2007). Deichmann strongly believed that citizens shouldn’t ask a question about the waste issue. Instead, they should trust engineers and experts to solve the recycling problem. He suggested that the only solution is burning waste materials including recyclable materials because “Recycling is a waste of time, money, and intellectual brain energy?” (FOR A.tv, 2007).

In his speech, Deichmann did not mention the reasons of judging the recycling as a waste of every thing. In my opinion, citizens of a civilized society have the right to ask every single question and get every detailed answer, and not to leave issues for experts and engineers to solve! The environment is ours, and we all feel responsible toward it; so we should all (engineers, physicians, scientists, and citizens) act together to protect it.

In contrast, numerous scientists believe in recycling as a simple, successful, and efficient system. The founder and president of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Neil Seldman, explains the importance of recycling by saying that composting and reusing materials extend the function of products, and reduce the extraction of natural resources (2008, p.). Seldman adds that recycling minimizes isolating behavior and encourages cooperating skills that lead to respectful society. Moreover, Seldman believes that recycling enhances creativity and stimulates ideas as it motivates people to achieve the idea of Zero Waste (Seldman, 2008). Allen Hershkowitz, a senior scientist at Natural Resources Defense Council, argues that the biggest advantage of recycling is the reduction of the need of landfills, which “generates hazardous and uncontrolled air emissions and also threaten surface and groundwater supplies.” (1998).

As an earth citizen, it is significant to be involved in a national movement. In fact, nothing is simpler than reducing, reusing, and recycling materials; and
nothing is more important than living in a healthy environment. I believe that when each person on earth acts individually and recycles every recyclable material, global relief will take place.

References