

The Impact of Recycling on the Environment

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The continuous activity of humankind has adverse impacts on the environment concerning the issue of increasing the numbers of landfills and the necessity to use more natural resources with the subsequent emission of hazardous substances and materials. The existing problem needs to be addressed, and recycling is one of the possible solutions. At the same time, there might be concerns whether recycling is an effective approach to changing the environment's condition for the better and whether the changes are worth the costs and efforts. In this way, it is crucial to support the affirmative position on the statement that recycling has short-term and long-term effects on the environment with the help of a review on the impacts of waste and a recent report on the benefits of recycling.

Waste materials and debris not only distort the external appearance of the environment, but also have a negative impact on flora and fauna, while changing the ecological systems and subtle eco-connections. The appalling tendency of factories and plants to throw their waste into rivers, seas, and oceans means that prevailing numbers of products contain hazardous chemicals and many of them “are considered endocrine disruptors, which can impair reproduction by mimicking or changing hormonal activity in animals” (“How our trash...,” 2015, para. 7). An issue of plastic waste products might be more disturbing than people can imagine; one example from National Geographic indicates the necessity of proper recycling: “albatrosses mistake plastic resins for fish eggs and feed them to chicks, which die of starvation or ruptured organs” (“How our trash...,” 2015, para. 14). Considering only these two examples, it becomes clear that recycling has both short-term (environmental purification) and long-term (eliminating the dangers for flora and fauna) benefits.

One of the key issues of waste is that people cover landfills with a layer of soil instead of recycling. Before humankind started their activity and made useful but dangerous inventions (such as plastic), nature had coped with the processing of waste, and it had been an extensive system of turning waste into beneficial soil fertilizers. It is important to mention that enormous numbers of waste covered under soil is the reason of methane emission, a gas that people know as the greenhouse gas—the one that makes them aware of the climate change issue ([devoncontractwaste], 2013, 01:20-01:44). Nevertheless, one should give credit to these people who are not only concerned about the issue, but also willing to change the situation with special voluntary programs and official companies aimed at recycling. A campaign called “Zero to Landfill” is aimed at recycling all appropriate materials to reduce the numbers of landfills. A well-organized sorting process ensures, for instance, that all metal materials are properly defined into the category “for further use,” and they send sorted metal products to places where they will be melted and used for creating new metal products ([devoncontractwaste], 2013, 06:47-07:10). As a result, recycling contributes to reducing the number of dangerous materials in a short-term perspective and makes improving the campaign aimed at fighting against climate change.

In order to have the complete understanding of how the environment can benefit from recycling, it is important to outline the findings of the Bureau of International Recycling’s report that includes such categories as aluminum, copper, ferrous, and paper. For instance, “the production of one tonne of aluminium from scrap requires only 12% of the energy required for primary production” (Grimes et al., 2016, p. 14). The data on the copper recycling provides the information that this process saves “of 40Mt of CO₂ annually and the equivalent of 100,000 GWh of electricity” (Grimes et al., 2016, p. 16). The overview of ferrous recycling reports that the secondary production consumes less energy and does not need the use of coke, which is

notorious for its adverse impact on gas emissions (Grimes et al., 2016, p. 19). In its turn, paper recycling might not eliminate the deforestation issue; nevertheless, apart from energy conservation, it contributes to the reduction of pressure on forests.

Summing up everything mentioned above, it is possible to state that recycling has both short-term and long-term positive impacts on the environment. Under the short-term impacts, one should understand the decrease in numbers of landfills and methane emission. The long-term impacts can be imperceptible; nevertheless, the active and proper participation in the recycling process contributes to reducing energy consumption and the numbers of animals suffering from the inability to understand that plastic, for instance, is a hazardous material for them. In addition to that, in the case of paper recycling, people will need smaller forest areas for industrial purposes. In this way, one should not underestimate the benefits of recycling and proper education on how they can participate in this process.

References

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