

Recycle Ann Arbor 2008 Earth Day Essay Contest – Runner Up Winner

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Recycling & Global Warming: A Positive Impact

Recycling can have a positive impact on global warming. Greenhouse gases occur naturally and are needed to create the greenhouse effect that makes the Earth warm enough to support life. However when we have too much of these gases we get global warming. Human use of fossil fuels like oil, coal, gasoline and natural gas are the main source of excess greenhouse gases. Global warming is the result of a concentration of green house gases that trap more heat in the atmosphere. This increase in trapped heat can cause changes in the climate and can alter weather patterns. Together these can in turn change the length of the seasons, cause coastal flooding and lead to more severe storms.

To reduce the effect of global warming studies have shown that recycling various materials can improve the situation. Today the United States recycles almost 30% of waste. This includes 42 percent of all paper, 40 percent of all plastic soft drink bottles, 55 percent of all aluminum beer and soft drink can, 57 percent of all steel packaging and 52 percent of all major appliances. In 1978 there was only one curbside recycling program in the U.S. By 1998 there were 9000 curbside and 12,000 drop off recycling centers. By 2000 over 500 material recovery plants had been established to process collected materials.

It is estimated that Americans alone produce about 20 percent of the world's output of greenhouse gases. And each American produces about 40,000 pounds of carbon dioxide every year. So you can see why it is important that we work even harder to increase the amount of material we recycle. There are six big categories of materials that we recycle on a daily basis in an average home and they are paper, plastic, steel "tin" cans, aluminum cans and glass. Let's take a look at how recycling can save energy and reduce global warming.

Recycle Paper: For each ton or 2000 pounds of paper recycled you can save 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4000 kilowatts of energy and 7000 gallons of water.

Recycle Aluminum Cans: Recycling just one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for three hours. It takes 95% less energy to recycle Aluminum than to make it from raw material.

Recycle Steel "Tin Cans": Recycling one pound of steel can run a 60 watt light bulb for over a day. In the U.S. the amount of steel recycled saves enough energy to heat and light 18,000,000 homes.

Recycle Plastic: Recycling glass from one bottle can run a 100-watt light bulb for four hours. It also causes 20% less air pollution and 50% less water pollution.

While many human activities have helped to create global warming, at least in the U.S. we have seen that recycling efforts are showing a strong positive impact on the situation. I think that at the same time we increase our efforts to recycle we must also learn not to buy or use products that worsen the situation. For example we should not buy products that use excessive packaging. Choose wisely when shopping for food and other goods for the home so that the amount of recycling you will need to do will also be a lot less.