

2010 Earth Day Essay Contest

How I Practice the Three Rs: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle

by Holden Mass

What is the biggest thing you have ever recycled? A bottle? A can? Maybe even a Christmas tree? Well, the biggest thing I have recycled is a two-car garage! Reducing, reusing, and recycling can be big or small, but either way they make our communities and our planet healthier, greener, and better for all of us.

Of course, reducing what I buy and use is not as exciting as recycling a garage, but every little bit helps. I share books and videos with my friends rather than buying another copy and I play at the park rather than having my parents install a play structure. I use both sides of the paper when I write or draw and I use the junk mail faxes we get as scratch paper. This helps save trees by lessening the demand for paper and keeps paper factories from using resources. I also use compact florescent light bulbs which don't have to be replaced as often as regular light bulbs. I don't use plastic plates or utensils and I use a refillable water bottle when I go to sports practices and games so I don't have to buy water in disposable bottles. Reducing is really important so that less waste is sent to landfills. Right now, there are more than 3,000 landfills in the United States. That might not sound like a lot, but every landfill takes the place of a park or a neighborhood or another space we can all enjoy.

I also try to reuse whenever I can. I take reusable canvas bags when I go shopping rather than getting paper or plastic bags at the store. This also saves trees and landfill space. We donate my clothes, shoes, toys, and eye glasses when I outgrow them so someone else can enjoy using them rather than throwing them away. I reuse my towel instead of wasting water and detergent by washing it every day. I also carry my lunch in a canvas bag that I reuse every day, rather than using and throwing away a paper bag.

I recycle whatever I can, including cans, bottles, plastic containers, glass jars, newspapers and magazines, paper bags, light bulbs, batteries, ink cartridges, and cell phones. But the best example of recycling I know is when our family recycled our two-car garage! When we bought our house, the garage was located in what we thought was an inconvenient place in our back

yard. Because it was a sturdy, well-built wooden garage, we decided to recycle it by having it moved rather than knocked down and taken away and another one built like most people thought we should. It took two days for the construction crew to move the garage and now it looks like it has always been in its current place. By recycling our garage, we kept a very large pile of wood, roof shingles, nails, and other building materials out of the landfill and we saved all the resources that would have been used to build a new garage. Plus, since our garage is so well built, we don't think we'll ever have to replace it.

In conclusion, we can—and should— all do things to reduce, reuse, and recycle. There are opportunities everywhere you look, even if they seem impossible to make happen at first. For example, recently at Walt Disney World I was surprised to see so many fireworks displays. Each park seemed to have one every night and they lasted a long time. Each display resulted in a lot of smoke and ash in the air and a lot of trash on the ground. I wrote to Disney and asked them to consider using fewer fireworks or having displays less often. I haven't heard anything back from them, but I am hopeful they will want to do their part to protect our planet. Even if they don't, I am proud of the way I use the three Rs to make Ann Arbor and our world a better place.