

Do Something Good for the Earth

Garbage! It smells bad and looks disgusting. Most people think about trash only when they take it out. People in the United States should be thinking about garbage more, however, because they throw away 40 percent of all the garbage in the world. The solution to this problem is recycling. Recycling is the best way to preserve natural resources and to reduce the costs of processing garbage.

By recycling, we can prevent our country from being buried in trash. Much of the garbage that is now tossed out could be recycled. Of the 200 million tons of garbage that U.S. citizens produce yearly, about 42 percent is paper (from trees), 8 percent is glass, 9 percent is metal (from ore, a natural resource), 7 percent is plastic (from petroleum, a natural resource), 8 percent is food waste, and 18 percent is yard waste. Government officials estimate that 60 percent of all this trash could be recycled. Environmentalists suggest a much higher figure—as much as 70 to 90 percent.

Recycling more of our garbage can also save precious resources. My grandfather says the thick forests that once surrounded my hometown have nearly vanished. By recycling newspapers, we can rescue trees from destruction. For example, recycling could help save some of the fifty thousand trees that are sacrificed every week to produce Sunday newspapers in the United States. We can also save water and energy by recycling. Recycling paper instead of making it from trees reduces the amount of water used to make the paper by 60 percent and the amount of energy by 70 percent. Aluminum cans show the biggest savings from recycling. To produce a can from recycled aluminum takes 95 percent less energy than from ore.

Recycling more can reduce the mountains of garbage we produce—and reduce the costs associated with all the landfills where the garbage is dumped. Garbage does not just disappear after it is hauled away. It usually goes into landfills—many of which have created toxic pollution problems and enormous cleanup costs. People often object to recycling by saying that it costs too much. Brenda Platt of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance says, “Studies have concluded that recycling costs less than traditional trash collection and disposal when communities achieve high levels of recycling.” Therefore, people should understand that recycling actually saves money by reducing waste and by eliminating the costs that go along with solid-waste disposal and landfill cleanup.

Much of what is thrown away now can be recycled. Anyone who loves the earth can help make it a better place by recycling. Garbage makes our shared home, this planet, less livable for the people of today and for the children of tomorrow. People have caused this garbage crisis, and only people can solve it. Do you care enough to do your part by recycling?

Crowds of students once streamed toward Smith High School just before the first bell, headed for their lockers to deposit their bulging backpacks. However, now they are out of luck. Now there is no rest for the weary and heavy-laden at Smith High School, where lockers have been removed by school administrators because of their concerns about crowded hallways and tardiness. As a result, Smith High School students carry their heavy backpacks all day—an unfortunate situation that will cause other serious problems for students and should be changed.

According to a school announcement, the decision to remove the lockers was prompted by congested hallways. During every passing period between classes, clumps of students filled the halls so that other students could not get to class on time. Tardiness had become a real issue for the administration and teachers. The school administration's answer was to remove the lockers from the high school.

Without lockers, students have been forced to carry heavy backpacks all day. This situation creates not only an inconvenience, but also a health risk. A recent study shows that carrying an overloaded backpack can result in serious muscle strain in a student's back and shoulders. Alexa Nuñez, a local chiropractor, reports an increase in the number of high school students who suffer from back and neck pain caused by carrying heavy backpacks. She says, "Students are carrying heavy backpacks slung over one shoulder and increasing their risk of injury." Nuñez also says that the American Chiropractic Association recommends that a backpack should weigh no more than 10 percent of the student's body weight, or no more than 15 pounds. A backpack full of textbooks and supplies, however, weighs 25 or 30 pounds. Asking students to carry this weight all day means ignoring basic health guidelines.

Besides the harm caused by carrying these backpacks, there is an additional danger once students get to class. Because a stuffed backpack cannot fit under a desk, it ends up jamming the aisle. As a result, students and teachers cannot move freely around the classroom, and they may trip and fall. In case of a fire or even a fire drill, what if a student stumbles on a backpack, falls, and smashes her head? In the rush to escape, what if no one notices her? Is this a risk that Smith High administrators are willing to take?

Because of the hardships imposed on students by the school administration's decision, I ask for one of the following actions. First, I urge the school administration to reconsider its decision and restore the lockers for student use at least before school, during lunch, and after school. If students used their lockers at these times, they would not fill the halls during the passing periods, risk being tardy, or jam the aisles. The students would have to carry only half of their day's required books and perhaps cut the weight of their backpacks in half. Second, if the school cannot reinstall the lockers for some reason, I request that the school remedy the situation with a widely discussed and widely used method: Issue two sets of textbooks—one for the classroom and one for home. Everyone is concerned about student health, but the school should not expose students to real health risks in order to prevent possible, but highly unlikely, risks. Removing the lockers was a mistake because of the problems it has created for the students. To correct its mistake, Smith High School should reinstall the lockers or issue another set of textbooks for each student.