Please Recycle!
by Alexandra Alesi

Recycling is an important tool for protecting our global environment. The threat of major climate change looms on the horizon and continues to grow. We must take every action necessary to reduce the release of harmful greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Recycling isn’t enough on its own, but its contributions are substantial. It reduces dangerous emissions in many significant ways: it conserves natural resources, it prevents pollution, it saves energy, and it preserves the environment for future generations.

At first glance, recycling seems fairly unremarkable. Its simplest definition is the repurpose of garbage to make new goods. However, we must think more globally about what goes into making new goods. In order to fashion a product, any product, there is a need to harvest natural resources, transport them to a factory, build the product, and then ship it out to retail facilities. This involved process of harvesting, transporting, building and shipping creates a tremendous environmental strain due to chemical gas emissions, liquid and solid waste run-off, and gasoline consumption.

Recycling eliminates many steps from the manufacturing process. There is no need to harvest new resources when one can simply repurpose those already harvested. This preserves natural resources, and prevents the destruction that results from extracting them from the environment. Why cut down a forest instead of recycling paper?

Patty Moore has been involved with recycling since 1983 and has her own recycling consultancy, Moore Recycling Associates, which helps businesses, governments, and communities handle waste management issues. She says that recycling can easily be accomplished on an individual level and scaled up to a larger manufacturing level. “Reduce your consumption,” Moore says. “I know that this sounds as if you have to give up something to help the environment, but it really doesn’t. Instead of hopping in the car to go somewhere for quality-time with the family, plan activities that you can do at home together.” It’s as simple as that.

Here are some amazing recycling statistics from the National Recycling Coalition:

* Every ton of paper that is recycled saves 17 trees.
* It takes 95% less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials.
* The energy we save when we recycle one glass bottle is enough to light a light bulb for four hours.
* When one ton of steel is recycled, 2,500 pounds of iron ore, 1,400 pounds of coal and 120 pounds of limestone are conserved.
* A national recycling rate of 30% reduces greenhouse gas emissions as much as removing nearly 25 million cars from the road.

As you can see from these statistics, recycling is vitally important for the environment. It is the morally sound thing to do to protect our beautiful planet for future generations. Please make sure you recycle!

The Recycling Racket
by Jenni Sadler

Recycling is often held up as a simple, common sense step the average person can take towards saving the world; this is a foolish presumption. Recycling’s benefits do not outweigh its costs, and it is ultimately just a way for people to feel better about themselves, a method which, in many ways, is self-defeating.

The primary problem is that it’s not cost effective. Paying to set up a network of trucks and processing centers to transport, receive, and repurpose trash is more expensive than creating and shipping new products. This is why many communities charge extra fees to residents in order to provide recycling pickup.

Recycling also produces carbon emissions through the transportation of recyclables and the recycling centers. Recycled plastics, glass, and metals must pass through a complicated, energy-intensive process in order to be turned into new products. Recycling itself uses three times more resources than does depositing waste in landfills.

Some people argue that recycling preserves resources, but this is misleading. Recycling more newspapers will not necessarily preserve trees, because many trees are grown specifically to be made into paper. And of course, recycled newspapers must be de-inked, often with chemicals, thus creating additional waste in the form of sludge. Glass is made from sand, the most abundant mineral in the crust of the earth.

Many recycling proponents claim there is a shortage of landfill space, but this is absurd. Studies have shown that holding all of America’s garbage for the next 100 years would only require a space that is 255 feet deep and 10 miles on each side.

The entire concept of recycling obscures the more important issues. Any benefits are meager, and distract from the real environmental issues facing this country and the world. The vast majority of waste and pollution in this country is industrial or agricultural in origin, and has little to do with what’s consumed or thrown away in residential households. The public must instead focus on the much bigger picture, tackling sources of carbon emissions and pollutants that far outweigh the amount of garbage produced by the average consumer.