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“What Does Recycling Mean to Me?”

With environmental problems on the rise everywhere, recycling is an important concept that continues to grow in prevalence. Global warming, numerous types of pollution, animal habitat endangerment and other issues seem to appear on the news and in our newspaper headlines with increasing frequency. For these reason, young American are growing up with the knowledge that they must develop environmentally fr5iendly habits for their lives now and for their existence as accountable citizens within society. Making a conscious effort to recycle is a key aspect of this development, and represents a strong sense of ecological responsibility to me.

Within our communities and schools, recycling is emphasized frequently as a sound environmental practice. In elementary school I remember seeing the recycling symbol with its distinct three white arrows on the sides of plastic bins, and my teacher reminding us to put our used papers products into those bins. But as often as I remember seeing this symbol and hearing my teachers’ verbal reminders to recycling, I felt that many people seemed to miss the true purpose of what recycling really was.

To me, recycling is a small step in a larger, much more significant process. When I purchase a product that is wasteful, I often do not realize it fully at the time, but by recycling it can help recoup some of the environmental losses incurred by the use of that product. However, recycling to me is not an ends to itself. When I recycle this product I should become more mindful that in the future I should buy less products in general to reduce the amount of material I am using, and that I should focus on buying products that *can* be recycled. Once this realization occurs, I view recycling as something to be done after I have already taken steps to minimize my impact on the environment- something that is not just an end in itself, but rather an activity that should lead to more a more serious style of environmentally-conscious living. Often humans utilize wasteful amounts of material for many products and manufactured items – and often times parts of these products are deemed recyclable, leading us to believe that we should continue using them. Instead, we should ask what we can reduce and reuse. But when it is not entirely realistic to reduce the amount of material being used, and when it is not possible to reuse the material, th3e next thing a responsible consumer can do is make sure that the material s capable of being recycled are properly handled and processed.

Through this course of action, recycling takes on more meaning than simply the action of putting paper in a green bin. Recycling is not simply a word, a term, a symbol, or a disposal bin you haul to the edge of your street every week to be collected- recycling is a way of life. To me, understanding recycling is more than disposing of your soda can in the correct receptacle when you are finished. To recycle correctly is to understand the role that human beings play in the ecological cycle as well as to be conscious of the impact that our use of materials has on the environment.

Recycling means using resources in a responsible manner and participating more directly in the natural cycle. As humans, we borrow things from nature, and recycling the things allows them to return to the natural cycle instead of being removed from it – sitting in a landfill, as many recyclable materials unfortunately do. Yet is we recycle consistently, we are making small steps towards mending the ecological damage humans have wrought upon the environment. Every time I make the effort to recycle a bottle or can in the correct bin, I understand that being a consumer does not mean I have to be wasteful or inefficient. To me, recycling is one important step toward a larger practice of earth-friendly living.