

Earth Day Essay Contest 2009

“If I were president, how would I get more Americans to recycle?”

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Introduction

If I were president, I would get more Americans to recycle by making recycling easier and more rewarding. My motto would be “Don’t throw out your trash, sell it.” Recycling makes trash valuable by processing waste through a series of treatments so that it can be used again. Manufacturers can make new products less expensively and cause less pollution using recycled materials instead of raw natural resources. Recycling also creates jobs for the people who process the waste and saves landfill space.

Recycling Now

If recycling is so worthwhile, why don’t we recycle more waste already? According to a Harris Poll from 2007, about one quarter of Americans don’t recycle, and the worst recyclers are young people not much older than myself. The waste materials most commonly recycled can be divided into categories like metal, glass, paper, and things that rot. Metal cans are recycled more often than anything else, probably because you get money back as a reward. Even young people recycle metal cans.

In my experience recycling begins from two places, but both places have problems. One place is a store where you can exchange specific waste materials for money, like a metal can for a dime. The other place is a home where you can put certain kinds of waste into special bins on garbage collection days. Both places discourage recycling. First, going to the store and remembering your cans is a hassle. Second, you don’t get any reward for putting waste in the special bins. So, recycling is inconvenient and frequently not very rewarding, and requires you to sort through your disgusting, smelly trash.

Encouraging Recycling

If I were president I would give Americans more financial rewards for recycling, and I would make recycling more convenient. I would also invest in companies that can invent technology and equipment to recycle waste more efficiently. The increased efficiency could make more recycling eventually pay for itself. Finally, to guarantee that everyone recycles, I would advertise the financial rewards for recycling and the new recycling conveniences especially to young people.

Conveniences

I would create special debit card recycling accounts (DCRA) for all Americans and allow people to collect financial rewards at more places including their homes. The DCRA's would be credited for recycled waste and people could use the DCRA cards to buy things. When you take metal cans to a store, you would get a credit on your DCRA card. When the collector picks up waste from your home, the collector would credit your DCRA based on the weight of your recyclable trash and how well you sorted the trash. For example, you would get a penny per pound of unsorted trash and a dollar per pound of sorted trash. The collectors could identify what account to credit based on a code on the recycle bin. I would give rewards for all recyclable trash including metal cans collected in the bins.

Rewards

If people recycle more metal cans because they receive a financial reward, I would also give financial rewards for glass, and paper, and things that rot. For example, I would give DCRA credit for any kind of glass based on how much it weighed. I would give DCRA credit for old newspapers and magazines and maybe even for spoiled fruits and vegetables.

Technology

If I were president, I would invest in technology to eliminate the consumer's or collector's sorting. Ultimately, I would set up a system that ships all trash and recyclable materials to one large plant per county or region. At these plants special computer-directed equipment would separate all recyclable and reusable materials from trash that can't be recycled. The recyclable and reusable materials would be separated into categories such as plastic, paper, glass, metal, compostable, (the stuff that can rot) and reusable. Then, the reusable materials would be washed and sold. The plastic, glass, and metal would be melted and mixed with new materials to maintain quality and molded into large cubes and sold. The paper would be bleached, refined, added to new materials, and turned into paper before being sold.

Conclusion

Today, not everyone recycles at least in part because recycling isn't very convenient or rewarding. If I were president, I would get more people to recycle by creating DCRA's, by increasing rewards, and by creating new technology to sort trash. Imagine what that would mean: not paying, but getting paid for someone to take your trash! In other words, "Don't throw out your trash, sell it."