

Write an argumentative essay in which you take a position on recycling. Use information from the article "Should we Throw Away the Recycling Program" to support your points. Be sure to include information (evidence) from the article.

### PRO/CON: Should we throw away the recycling program?



#### **PRO: The costs of recycling outweigh the benefits**

If you're worried about the planet, please make sure your garbage is buried in a landfill. There is plenty of space available.

On the surface, the phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle" may seem like a realistic call to action. It makes particular sense to those who

want to reduce the amount of oil and gas that are burned and halt climate change, and reduce the amount of garbage we will leave for future generations to deal with.

The truth, however, is that the cost of the recycling process almost always outweighs the benefits. Even the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says it only makes sense economically and environmentally to recycle about 35 percent of our trash. Among those materials are paper and aluminum cans, according to the government department.

#### **More Expensive and More Electricity**

Recycling 1 ton of paper or aluminum cans, the agency says, can save about 3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions over producing new materials. Carbon dioxide, a gas, is produced during the recycling process and can lead to climate change. A ton equals 2,000 pounds. Not so fast.

Paper mills pay for the trees they process. If it was cheap enough to recycle scrap paper, producers would be beating down your door to buy it. There is a good reason why they aren't.

It's more expensive and takes more electricity and water to recycle old paper than to cut down pine trees, turn them into paper, and then grow new trees.

Plastic, which is made from oil, is another problem. Recently the price of oil has gone way down. It has now become cheaper to make a new plastic container than to recycle an old one.

Also, the EPA says that recycling a ton of plastic saves only about a ton of carbon dioxide. However, that doesn't take into account the water to rinse their plastic containers before people put them into a recycling bin.

John Tierney is a science writer for The New York Times newspaper. He pointed out that if people use hot water to wash plastic containers, they actually contribute to sending more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Coal or gas is burned to heat the water up in the first place.

### **Are We Pretending About Recycling?**

Glass is even worse. To reduce emissions by 1 ton you have to recycle 3 tons of glass. Including the cost of collecting old glass from neighborhoods, and the pollution produced by the collection trucks and the recycling process itself, glass recycling creates more emissions. It is also more expensive than making glass from scratch. New glass is made mainly from sand, and we have plenty of cheap sand in the world.

Many cities pick up glass in recycling trucks only to dump it at the local landfill. Why are they pretending? Because people feel emotional about the motto "reduce, reuse, recycle." They learn it in school and hear it everywhere they go. Most Americans are blind to the evidence about recycling programs.

More environmentalists should consider the costs and benefits of recycling programs. They should get rid of those that waste money and harm the environment. If recycling saved money, companies would be lined up at your doorstep to buy your trash. Don't look now, because they're not there.

The true recycling test is whether someone will pay you to sort and save your trash. If they're not, what you've been told about recycling is probably just garbage.

### **CON: Recycling cuts down the amount we waste**

We Americans use a lot and waste a lot. We dump far more trash than we need to into landfills. In fact, we make twice as much garbage per person as Western Europe.

The amount of trash produced annually in the United States has tripled since 1960. In 2013, it totaled 254 million tons, which comes to 4.4 pounds per person every day. A ton equals 2,000 pounds.

We've made a lot of progress over the years in handling garbage. People started recycling much more after the mid-1980s. On average, Americans today recycle or compost about one-third of their trash.

### **Seattle's Pay-As-You-Throw System**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a government department. It reports that we recycle about two-thirds of paper, and just over half of aluminum cans. Yet, we recycle only 4 out of 10 electronics items such as cellphones and computers, and only about one-third of glass containers and even slightly less of plastic bottles and jars.

We should be able to do much better than this. So why don't we? Some people just don't want to bother recycling. A number of states say that people have to recycle, but they don't enforce their laws. In most cases, they do not offer people much reason to recycle.

Some states and cities do much better because they take recycling seriously. Cities such as Seattle, Washington, encourage recycling. Seattle charges people money for throwing out their garbage. People call it a pay-as-you-throw system. Even if the cost is small, it encourages people to recycle, and they do.

In 2014, half the people in Seattle recycled their trash. This rate continues to improve. The city is trying to reduce as much garbage as possible. Few other cities have set such a high goal.

### **Critics Sending the Wrong Message**

Some critics see matters differently. They argue that recycling costs too much and is not effective. Some states seem to agree with them. They do not want to contribute to the cost of city recycling programs and say the cities should end their programs or pay for the cost themselves.

Is this the right action to take? Recycle only if there are enough benefits? Doing that would send exactly the wrong message.

Some experts believe that we should start way before this point. We should prevent or reduce waste when things are made. Then we should reuse what is left over, and only then throw out what cannot be recycled.

No one argues that the cost of recycling is not important. Still, there are ways to deal with that cost rather than say it is too high and abandon recycling programs. We could follow the lead of cities like Seattle by putting a price on trash. If people have to pay more, they will find ways to reduce the amount of trash they throw-out. Also, the fees can cover the cost of recycling programs.

We are in the early stages of an important change. It will reduce waste and pollution and get people to change what they use and what they throw out. That's the way to go.