

Trash Talk

When it comes to trash probably the general approach is to just “throw it away.” Actually, though, trash warrants a closer look and deeper understanding than this.

When we talk trash, we’re talking about the use of our resources, our air and water quality, land use, energy and money.

First, it is important to consider that there is no such place as “away.” Unless the materials you dispose of are recycled, the trash hauler picks them up and transports them to a landfill that is in somebody’s “back-yard”—not “away.” That trash then remains indefinitely in the landfill most likely in the same condition that it was when you tossed it in the trash. However, even though landfills are lined with either compacted clay or plastic, they are not infallibly leak-proof and do leach pollutants into our ground water and waterways.

Sending trash to a landfill is not an efficient use of resources. While we will no doubt always need landfills for those materials that can’t be reclaimed, there is much we (you and I in our own households and businesses) can do to greatly reduce the waste stream to them.

Recycling is probably the first action that comes to mind as a step in accomplishing trash reduction. And, it is a very significant and important action for more efficient use of resources and energy and to decrease use of landfills. Recycling accounts for one of the three Rs in the chasing arrow recycling symbol. While the other Rs don’t get a lot of emphasis, they are at least as important as recycling.

One of the Rs stands for reduce. Reducing the amount of material for disposal or recycling should be the first step considered. It is a more efficient use of resources, energy and money than recycling. Avoiding excess packaging is a good place to begin to reduce trash. When purchasing items, look for those with the least amount of packaging, and buy products such as cereal in bulk or in the largest container available. Avoid products packaged in single-serving containers. Instead, buy a larger quantity and repackage at home in reusable single-serving containers.

Plastic bags were first produced in 1977 and now —just 33 years later —14 billion are used annually in the U.S. That is a tremendous amount of material destined for the landfill or to blow around in the environment. Using reusable cloth bags every time you shop is a significant way to reduce this waste.

Avoid disposable products—use cloth napkins instead of paper, cloth

diapers instead of disposables and reusable dinnerware instead of the throwaways. The important thing is to become aware and see how many additional ways you can reduce trash generated in your home. The average person produces more than four pounds of trash per day—a huge increase over the last few decades.

Reuse is another of the Rs. Repair an item when possible rather than pitching it and buying a new one. Also, shopping in thrift stores, buying used books, renting equipment instead of buying are all ways to cut the traffic to the landfill.

There should be a fourth R for “repurchase” to remind us to buy products with recycled content in order to provide markets for those materials we recycle. Products with recycled content usually have a statement to that effect.

Recycling in Cass County continues to become more available. Curbside recycling is offered in some cities and mobile recycling is available on a regular schedule in the communities of Freeman, Peculiar, Drexel and Garden City. Glass recycling also recently became available at three locations in Cass County. Information about recycling, as well as schedules, and locations of the mobile recycling and glass recycling, visit www.CassCountySustainability.com

