Recycling Returns[1]

By Brian Tomasik

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What is a process that represents one of the most basic yet effective environmental solutions to mounting ecological devastation? One is recycling, an indispensable process that not only reduces the quantity of waste in landfills or pollution from garbage incineration, but which also saves energy, water, and resources. Because of its value, recycling should be expanded, especially in the U.S. where the potential exists to recycle much more waste that is currently thrown away.

For this reason, the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC) became concerned when the recycling of plastic, glass, and aluminum cans and bottles stopped for the 2001-2002 school year. "Last year, there was no program for recycling incorporated into the budget," explained Katy Hartman, co-president of SEAC. "This year, after talking to the administration, it was put back into the budget."

This year, SEAC is working to implement the following proposal to reinstate recycling. Every participating advisory keeps a box in their room in which students should dispose of bottles and cans. During each advisory period, one student from each classroom carries the box to the east or west lobby and empties the contents in the large recycling bins there. SEAC members then carry these to recycling collection bins outside the new gym, where, approximately each week, Accurate Disposal, Inc. picks up the recyclables, according to Robert Paquette, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

Guilderland High School recycles approximately seven to ten large plastic bags full of cans and bottles every week, according to estimates by SEAC members. Recycling of these translates into prodigious environmental benefits, including reduced incineration, energy use, waste accumulation, and air pollution.

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1 This article was published in the *GHS Journal*, the student newspaper at Guilderland Central High School, Guilderland, NY, USA. I don't remember the exact date, but it was probably around Nov-Dec 2002. The title was changed for the print publication to something like "SEAC brings back GHS recycling," but I don't remember the exact title, nor can I find the information online. I imagine that some of the contents of this article's body may have been altered for publication too. I don't now (in 2014) necessarily endorse the views I held at the time of writing this piece.

According to the Reynolds Metal Company, the recycling of one aluminum can consumes one-twentieth of the energy used to produce the same can from raw materials; this is enough energy to power a television for three hours. NASA reports that recycling glass generates one-fifth less air pollution and 50 percent less water pollution than creating new glass products.

In spite of this, the United States is far behind most other developed countries in the quantity of products it recycles. Of the twenty most industrialized democracies, America is nineteenth in glass recycling, according to a 1995 ranking by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Given that, per person, Americans create more waste and air pollution and consume more water and energy than anyone else on earth, the United States government should more actively pursue the advancement of recycling programs, following the example of other industrialized nations.

SEAC hopes to play a part in that by ensuring the continuation of recycling at GHS. "Americans are the ultimate consumers," commented Marilyn Davis, an advisor for SEAC. "We use up far more than our fair share of the earth's resources. We live in a throw-away society based on our personal convenience. The least we can do is dispose of our recyclables in a manner that promotes conservation of our resources. It doesn't take much effort on our part."