Why Recycle?

By Robby Starinsky

The conscious effort to recycle is one that is eventually up to each and every one of us. There are numerous steps in the recycling process for various products, but the choice as to whether or not the product will be recycled at all is made by the individual. The reasons that one makes this choice are speculative, however an understanding of the recycling process as a whole may inspire one to make the correct choice. Very few individuals truly appreciate the efforts that the recycling industry makes in order to attempt to sustain our planets limited resources. If the general population can appreciate and honestly get behind recycling, they can make a world of a difference.

The first step to becoming informed is to know the truth about the recycling problem at hand. As recent as 2012, only 35% of households, and 10% of businesses in the United States decided to recycle. This lack of success has been consistent for the past 15 years, even though billions of dollars have been funneled towards pro-recycling efforts around the nation. If the United States could reach a recycling rate of 75%, that would be the equivalent of removing 50 million cars each year. Not only would this help the environment, but it would allow the recycling industry to substantially grow, creating 1.5 million jobs. The large upside and the lack of negative consequences for the recycling initiative make it surprising that the issue is not a higher priority for the United States.

Lack of recycling is a clear problem across the United States, but there is also a more subtle issue with the lack of awareness regarding what the recycling process actually consists of. Even though the most important step is the initial act of a consumer deciding to recycle a product, there is a lot more to recycling than most know.

After the recyclable products are separated from the non-recyclable products by a consumer, they are gathered by a recycling collection service that is often hired by the local government or the property owner. The recycling collection and processing industry in Ohio is dominated by two major entities. The first is Waste Management, a national company that provides recycling services as a small portion of its business. The second is Rumpke, a regional company based in Cincinnati, Ohio.

After these companies collect recyclable products, they sort the products based on commodity classifications that the products will be processed into. The company then processes the recyclable products into usable commodities that can be resold. There are a large variety of commodities that can be recycled and resold including aluminum, plastic, paper, cardboard, and even glass. These are very common waste products that can be easily recycled by consumers all over the nation.

Many commodities are recycled and then are resold at different prices based on the market value of each commodity and the sales talents that the commodities broker possesses. Each recycling company like Waste Management or Rumpke has commodities brokers who sell the recycled products to vendors, using present and future market conditions to negotiate a profit maximizing price. The faster the broker can sell the recycled products and the higher the price at which they sell them determine the profits that the company receives.

This profit is the initiative that drives companies such as Waste Management or Rumpke to continue providing recycling services. A company such as Waste Management continues the recycling portion of its business even though it isn’t their most profitable venture. This is because of the social benefit that is associated with recycling. If the general public knew the sacrifice that that the company made, it is reasonable to believe that they would be more willing to put an effort towards recycling themselves.

Even though most of us envision an ideal world where everyone decides to recycle, the truth is that many of us don’t. It is hard to say whether or not this lack of recycling is due to a lack of information, an inability to carry out the act, or even just pure laziness. No matter what the reason it is evident that our recycling as a whole is falling short of what it should be. Knowledge regarding the life of a recycled product and also regarding the truth of our nation’s lack of recycling can be a useful tool for increasing recycling efforts by consumers. The consumer’s initial choice of whether or not a product is recycled is the key to fixing our recycling problem.