

Shirley Freriks: Circular economy — plastic has value if ...

Plastic has changed our lives for the better in many ways, and overconsumption in our throw-away society is now coming around to haunt us.

Single-use plastics, in particular, have made mountains of trash and fouled our streams and oceans, killed many of its inhabitants, and now microplastics are threatening human health. We used to just send it off to Asia — out of sight, out of mind. BUT now the Basel Treaty has stopped every country from sending its trash to any other country. We need to deal with the results of our high consumption and take steps – big steps – to turn this around and fast! See <http://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/video/tv/brief-history-how-plastic-has-changed-our-world>.

We can design waste and pollution out of the system with a circular economy approach: <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept>

Circular economy is the wave of the future: Keep all the molecules of usable materials in circulation to make new products, find new uses and keep them out of the landfill where they create methane and other greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Climate change and plastic pollution are directly related issues, since plastic is derived from petroleum. The materials we are accustomed to recycling — or throwing out of sight, out of mind — have value. It is not waste if we humans recycle right: theconversation.com/how-to-turn-plastic-waste-in-your-recycle-bin-into-profit-147081

And it is not hard. It just takes thinking about it up front, before we buy. It's about how we choose to spend our money. Just say "no" to plastic and find alternatives. Refill your laundry detergent container at GAIA/SOAP near SPD. If you love a product that comes in a non-recyclable #5 container (think yogurt), write the manufacturer to ask for a change.

It is a fun research project for the whole family to look for alternative ways to stop using single-use plastic. Buy snacks in bulk.

No need to throw away plastic bags. Return them to the designated boxes at B and C, Safeway, SaveMart, Grocery Outlet, Holiday markets, and RiteAid (no box out front, just ask). Plastic bottles that have the CRV logo can be taken to Rite Aid and K Mart for redemption (call for specifics), as well as to the WM McCourtney road waste facility. Check out online plastic packaging recycling with TerraCycle <http://www.terracycle.com/en-US/#> .

Many new alternative packaging ideas are coming forth, like the fully recyclable paper bottle Coca-Cola is piloting. Seventh Generation and TruEarth are offering products with minimal plastic-free packaging. BriarPatch has lots of new sustainability ideas. Go to the Waste Management/WasteNOT Facebook page for many ideas on what you can do as

well as new ideas to eliminate the concept of waste:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/wastenotnevadacounty>

Accepting responsibility — you and me and the producers of these plastics — is the key to turning things around. If we give our planet Earth time and space to renew itself, it will.

The new CALRecycle Commission on Recycling is looking at all aspects of this recycling crisis to come up with solutions. Extended producers responsibility bills are already proposed at the state and federal levels to ask producers to find new alternative materials to plastics, particularly single-use plastics like snack bags and bottles we buy, use up and throw away.

Well, folks, there is no “away.” Most just goes to landfill, and that must change in order to solve the plastic predicament.

Now, this is not Waste Management’s fault. When China abruptly stopped taking our trash a couple years ago, it caused a crisis here. There are not enough facilities to process our waste into new materials, so we are in the trough as all parties scramble to find solutions fast.

If we, the residents, take responsibility to recycle in the way Waste Management requests (like keeping all contamination out of the recyclables), then the materials we offer will be the clean stream necessary to be reprocessed so we can accomplish a circular economy.

If we allow food waste and other contaminants to go in the recycling bin, it means that whole truckload of potentially recyclables might go to landfill. Natural resources are limited. Refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle right.

Let’s step up to the challenge and start a citizen-led campaign to do our parts to reduce our consumption of single-use plastics in the first place, and increase clean recycling.

We can turn this around to reduce global warming, which is at least part of the factor with the size of the fires right here at home. Look at the Waste Management website for details on how to recycle right: wm.com/recycle-right, and the Facebook page for lots of ideas on what you can do, and add your own. Future generations will thank you.

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