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Editor's Corner - The Other Two-Thirds

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The Other Two-Thirds

As the decade of the nineties rolls on, it is becoming apparent that the "fad" for this era in our lifetime is environmental awareness. No where is that awareness more evident than in the hundreds of tons of materials that are recycled by Americans each year.

Unfortunately, **recycling** is only one-third of the effort necessary in the material reclamation equation. To be truly effective in our efforts to clean up solid waste and ease the burden on natural resources, we must remember the other two-thirds of the equation.

Before recycling even comes into play, we must concentrate on **reducing** the amount of trash that is produced. Consider the amount of packaging that is used in items we purchase every day. Most of it is not necessary. Take, for example, pre-packaged bags of apples or oranges: the fruit has a perfectly good wrapping of its own--the skin! We must eliminate extraneous waste by eliminating unneeded packaging and, thereby, **reducing** the amount of raw materials and natural resources used in the production of packaging *and* the amount of waste.

The middle step in the reclamation cycle (and the most commonly practiced one) is **recycling**. Many households and companies already sport multiple trash cans for recycling. Recycling fever has even hit the homes and offices of our favorite television families. But recycling, while being the most popular form of demonstrating our environmental awareness, cannot be successful on its own. It must be part of the entire cycle.

Without the last step in the cycle, **reusing**, all of the effort that goes into reducing and recycling is lost. Unless companies choose to use recycled materials in the manufacturing of new products, the recycled material becomes trash. The secret shame of America's recycling effort was recently exposed on the *CBS Evening News*. While Americans are willing to make the effort to recycle, they are not willing to make the effort to purchase goods made with recycled materials. Companies have found that it is most often cheaper to use raw materials than it is to process recycled materials. Paper must be bleached to remove the ink. Plastics must be melted down and processed according to their recycling codes. Glass must have the labels removed and must be ground and melted for reuse. With the increase in production costs comes an increase in the price of the products, and American consumers have demonstrated that they will not pay extra for recycled goods.

Without the “other two-thirds” of the reclamation cycle, our efforts to help clean up our environment are largely wasted. Recycling is the job of the public, but it is difficult to make the manufacturing communities change their ways. We can write letters and make calls urging companies to reduce and reuse until we are blue in the face, but the best way to let them know what we want is to use our purchasing dollars as votes for the environment. Support companies that demonstrate sound environmental practices. Purchase items with little amounts of packaging. Look for labels indicating the use of recycled or “reclaimed” materials. Use concentrated products (such as laundry detergent or fabric softener) that will help reduce the amount of packaging that is thrown away. If we choose to spend our money on products made by companies that use sound environmental policies in their manufacturing procedures, we are, in effect, casting a powerful ballot for the environment.

Last Thoughts

It hardly seems possible that I have been the editorial assistant for the *Iowa Science Teachers Journal* for six years now. What seems even more impossible is the fact that I am leaving the *Journal*.

In the time that I have worked for *ISTJ*, I have learned quite a lot about science education in general. Being a student of English and music, my friends often kidded me about the area in which I worked, but the combination seemed to work alright for me.

As my last “official” act for the *Journal*, I would like to take this opportunity to officially introduce my replacement. Jonna Higgins is a junior in English at the University of Northern Iowa. Some of you may recognize her name as she began working with us on the last issue of the *Journal*. I am glad that I have had the chance to work with Jonna and I think that she will be a fantastic editorial assistant.

Thanks to everyone who made my job easier as time went by, especially the authors and our referees and assistant editors, and a special thanks to our copy editor, Marge Vargas, and our editor, Carl Bollwinkel, for all that they have taught me over the years. I will miss you all!

--S.A.A.