

Opinion

The Pendulum
Serving the Elon College Community

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The Pendulum welcomes your opinion, limited to about 250 words where possible. All letters must be signed and a phone number included. The deadline for submission of articles and letters is 5 p.m. Monday. The Pendulum, founded in 1974, is published by Elon College students each Thursday during regular school terms.

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Thanks is again owed to Prof. Brad Hamm. Special thanks also to Prof. Ann Cassebaum.

Elon College Can Lead In Waste Management

By Laurie L. Wommack
Special to The Pendulum

The following essay was judged best non-fiction by a freshman writer during 1988-89.

Elon College can help solve one of the world's largest and most distressing problems of today -- waste management. Elon can provide a necessary ingredient for problem solving, education. First, Elon can help create an awareness, then it can suggest possible course of action and provide a strategy to minimize the volume of waste.

Currently, Americans are "the most prolific producers of solid waste on earth," according to one researcher. While different methods to control the enormous volume of waste produced have been attempted, few strategies have proven adequate.

The conventional methods -- landfills and incinerators -- used in the United States are becoming less efficient, less available, more expensive and more burdensome. Landfill sites are becoming increasingly more scarce as the filled-to-capacity sites are forced to close.

Social, "not in my backyard" obstacles impede the search for new, acceptable sites and escalate land prices for landfill operators.

The other currently used method of disposal, the incinerator, produces toxic ash residue which crates extra burden because it must be disposed of carefully.

With only these two methods of disposal and their drawbacks, the rising consumer demand for disposable, "throwaway" packaging only compounds the problem. Therefore, the consumer society of America must undergo a change of lifestyle if the problem is to be solved.

Such a change in lifestyle involves a shift from today's "throwaway society" to a recycling society. It is the logical solution to reduce the volume of solid waste at its source, the consumer.

But recycling is not only the most logical solution, it holds the most promise for success because

of its simplicity and practicality. "Recycling...is perhaps the best known way to reduce waste," according to Time Magazine. In addition to reducing the sheer volume of waste, recycling also may slow the depletion of many natural resources because most recyclable items may be recycled again and again.

According to a recent report by the National Committee for Economic Development, recycling serves three purposes. It lowers pollution and conserves scarce raw materials. Recycling can even reduce business costs. For instance, making aluminum cans from old cans saves 95% of the energy and creates 95% less pollution than making new cans.

Thus, recycling benefits the environment and simultaneously benefits business interests. Such a solution which satisfies both industrialists and environmentalists must be implemented.

Some countries have realized the benefits of recycling and the results reflect successful strategy, notably Japan. In 1988, Japan recycled 50% of its waste paper, 55% of its glass containers, and 66% of its beverage and food cans. Such recycling success overwhelms the American effort, where only 10% of recyclable waste is recycled.

With Japanese recycling technology and systematic garbage collection alone, such success could not have been achieved. As Time Magazine has reported, "Prudent waste management would not be possible without the disciplined cooperation of the Japanese people."

By separating bottles from cans and burnables from non-burnables, the Japanese make garbage collection more efficient. From the 100,000 tons of typical garbage produced in a Japanese city each year, according to one estimate, there comes "enough wood pulp to make a roll of toilet paper that would wrap around the earth ten times."

In some areas of the United States, recycling has been

extremely successful. The Oregon legislature passed the Recycling Opportunity Act of 1983 to make recycling a more accessible alternative to dumping for the general public. According to *Oregon Statesman-Journal* reporter Michelle McGurk, a state recycling expert says the program has been "highly successful" due to "the fact that cities are surpassing the recycling requirements of the law."

She further reports that while 70 cities are required to provide monthly garbage collections of cardboard, newspaper, tin cans, household glass, aluminum cans,



and used motor oil for recycling, 100 cities currently provide the service.

So the law has spurred community support and induced voluntary compliance with the recycling regulations outlined in the Recycling Opportunity Act. By 1984, 90% to 95% of the glass bottles, 75% of the newspaper, and 62% of the cardboard used in the state was recycled.

Frankly Speaking

by Phil Frank

