



What Can Industry Do?*

Activity M.j

GRADE LEVELS: 7 - 8

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

List ways industry is finding solutions to solid waste management problems.

Write letters to companies asking how they are helping to reduce solid waste.

MATERIALS:

Current newspaper, weekly magazines

Transparency

PROCEDURE:

1. On a Monday, the teacher displays newspaper headlines concerning environmental issues and asks volunteers to read the headlines (or use Transparency). The class then discusses how industry is responding to the environmental issues in solid waste management according to the headlines displayed.
2. The question is asked, "What can industry do to help preserve and protect our world?" A discussion is then begun describing ways companies can invest in efforts to help solve our solid waste management problems (e.g., they can recycle, make harmless chemicals, reduce volume of solid waste, etc.).
3. The teacher then explains how newspapers and magazines report on ways in which industry contributes solutions to the solid waste problems. The teacher also explains that these articles appear almost daily because consumers want to be updated on environmental issues. These articles help sell newspapers. In other words, this is all "hot news." Children can collect headlines and make a post of "hot news."
4. The teacher gives each student a specific week during the school year to find an appropriate article describing industry's efforts in the publications provided. On the following Monday, the student or "Earth Watcher" presents a synopsis of an article that s/he has cut out.
5. That student must then write a letter to any company in the world asking what it is doing to help solve the solid waste problem. The letter and envelope are given to the teacher before being sent so that a master list of companies can be compiled. The company names are posted on a roster in the classroom so that no efforts are duplicated.
6. At the end of the unit, the teacher arranges for a representative of a local industry to speak to the class regarding the company's efforts to find solutions to the solid waste management problem.

*Source: Du Pont Solid Waste Management Curriculum K – 6

discussion:

Government Setting Regulations – In more than nine states there are laws requiring or encouraging curbside source separation and recycling programs. Under these programs, aluminum, glass, plastics, and newspapers are separated at the curb and taken to recycling centers. An advantage to this is that it reduces the amount of waste that goes into the landfill and it provides a supply of material for recycling operations. A disadvantage is that it is sometimes hard to enforce. Tax dollars that are used to monitor this program could be used in another way to benefit the citizens. The programs that have been the most successful are the ones that have provided collection containers for homeowners to use.

Some towns, states, and the federal government have also passed (or are trying to pass) legislation that would restrict or ban the sale of certain products or materials. For example, 24 states now have laws that require degradable six-pack ring carriers. But by 1992, a federal law will become effective that requires that all six-pack ring carriers are degradable.

Government Providing Incentives – Instead of passing laws to change people's behavior, the government often uses taxes to encourage people to use more efficient packaging and to recycle. For example, the state of Florida has enacted legislation imposing a one- to two-cent disposal fee on aluminum, glass, paper, or plastic containers of five ounces or more if a 50% recycling rate for these containers is not achieved by October 1, 1992.

In several other states, legislation was introduced that would impose sales and use taxes on non-degradable and non-recyclable packaging materials. The advantage of this legislation is that businesses will look for more efficient ways to package their products. A disadvantage is that under our free market economy, the tax will just be passed on to the consumer. Often the burden of these taxes falls harder on lower income consumers than higher income consumers. In addition, often little thought is given to the environmental impact of the replacement product.

A Combination of Both – Some states have combined laws and incentives to accomplish their goal of limiting the amount of garbage generated. Nine states have passed laws that require a deposit of a nickel or more on each soft drink and malt beverage container bought by consumers. To get their money back, consumers must return the empty containers. Returned containers are then sorted and recycled. However, beverage containers represent less than 6% of the solid waste stream.

For example, Washington state fines people who litter and encourages voluntary recycling at the state's estimated 1,000 recycling locations.

6. Once the possibilities of government action have been discussed, students should identify what their local or state government could be doing, but is not, and write to one of their elected officials and express their views of what could be done to help solve the problem of solid waste management.

RELATED ACTIVITIES:

1. Cut out newspaper articles.
2. Invite government officials to visit the classroom to speak on solid waste management.