

Don't Throw It Away!

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By the Mr. of Mrs. Green – with permission to print from
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That's rubbish, just throw it away ...

How many times have you heard that or said it yourself ?

It must be one of the most common phrases in our language. We think it so often that it has become 'normalised' in our minds. Rubbish is something useless, something we don't want, something to be thrown away...

Did you ever stop to think *where* or *what* 'away' is? Is it just a term like 'get rid of...' or 'throw out'?

What it really means is;

- **'I don't want this and I'm not responsible for it any more'**

It's a word about separation of what you have, but what you don't want.

There is a problem here. Away is always somewhere else, it is not a magical black hole that takes all the stuff we want to be free of and somehow finds a new happy home for it. When we 'throw our rubbish away' it usually means it goes somewhere else that is anything but happy and certainly not a good home.

At best when we throw our rubbish away, it ends up in the waste bin, but then it gets collected and probably dumped into the earth to rot and contaminate. Worse still the waste is collected and incinerated and potentially produces other toxic contamination for the environment. Even worse, we throw our rubbish away onto the ground as litter that is at the mercy of winds, water and the scattering process of peoples carelessness. Ultimately, all our waste ends up contaminating something or some creature, including ourselves.

Every time you throw something 'Away' it goes to a place that is usually worse than when you had it.

In the UK we throw away 30 million tonnes of rubbish a year – that's half a tonne each. How many times did you '*throw it away*' to accumulate all that? Much of this rubbish is thrown away needlessly. This wastes valuable resources like glass, paper, aluminium and tin, and pollutes the environment as harmful chemicals leach into the ground around landfill sites. 30 million tonnes of waste gone somewhere else, out-of-sight, out-of-mind and secretly infecting the planet.

There's no such place as away, it's always somewhere else.

And yet we continue to manufacture and consume products that

have

- built in obsolescence,
- perceived obsolescence
- non-recyclable packaging.

We continue to indulge our wants and self-serving agendas oblivious to the environmental impact of our choices. Tucked away in our comfortable walled up environments, we don't see and don't care about where our waste goes. **Out-of-sight ... out-of-mind** serves us well. Blinkers on and the sound turned down, we neither see, nor hear the plight of the natural world that is literally heaving with the weight and devastation of what we are doing. The millions of tons of waste that we are relentlessly pumping into the sea, the Earth and atmosphere are accumulating, mutating and creating a vast cancer of seething chemicals that only create harm and death as they spread mercilessly across the planet.

If waste was dumped in your garden, what would you think?

No-one has the right to do that and someone would have to pay the cost of polluting your property. We all think we have rights, because we are human, we are special, we are *civilised people*. The planet and the creatures that inhabit the earth appear to have NO RIGHTS at all. They have no voice of protest when we dump millions of tonnes of rubbish in their feeding grounds. When we tear down their habitats and pollute their waters, no-one breaths a word about their rights. It's ok, because we are the superior species and we can do what we like. We've been dumping waste relentlessly since the industrial revolution. That seems like a short period in history starting just over 100 years ago, a mere blink in evolutionary history and yet in that short period we have significantly destabilised the natural balance of the ecosystem to an alarming level.

Somehow, we just don't believe it, we call it 'scaremongering'

And that helps to relegate the seriousness and sooth our conscience. Or maybe we do see the shadow of what is coming and ignore the consequences, hoping that science and policy makers will magically come up with a solution. We viewed a program by the Discovery Team that was showing a proposed project to pump cold water from 1000 feet in the oceans to the surface in order to create co2 eating diatoms. These scientists seriously see this as a potential 'answer' to our co2 emissions. Despite the potential to imbalance the ocean's eco-system and disrupt the already delicate plankton environments. And that's the way we see things now; solution engineering takes over from prevention engineering. It's just like modern medicine, we look for ways to alleviate the symptoms, rather than prevent the illness in the first place.

The horse has already bolted and we are turning all our attention to catching the beast, while the faulty gate is still wide open for others to follow.

If this kind of 'fix-it' mentality prevails ...

We are set to see some pretty horrendous actions in the next few years. The whole waste incineration issue is built on solution engineering and not prevention engineering. Manufacturers are still offer placating excuses for their greed marketing and profit campaigns. Oil producers still hold us in a stranglehold by shielding developments in alternative technologies until they have exhausted their oil supplies. Government and local councils make lame choices to placate us with half-hearted proposals to improve waste management, but only if it secures votes in the ballot box. Very few people or organisations are fully committed to preventing the problem of waste, outside of a profit benefit for themselves.

Does all that seem too harsh,

What it really means is;

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If it does, it's because the answer to all our problems is starring us in the mirror every day. All the while we talk in big political and corporation language, we are still chasing the escaping beast and our eyes are way off the ball. The answer is, as 'Occams razor' points out- the most simple and obvious; One person... you, multiplied millions of times over. You are the sole and collective answer to the Earth's

environmental siege. You, me, us, together provide the single most effective prevention and solution engineering impact to the world's problem of waste, global warming and environmental catastrophe. **Every consumer choice and purchase decision you make is a vote of confidence for the producer of the product or service.** The more votes they get, the more they produce. It's a simple equation of demand creates supply. Every time you buy something you add a vote for that item and say "That's what I want, you are making it right and I agree with your values" These consumer votes are responsible for the vast corporations we see today. They are responsible for political actions and policies and all the way down to the taste in your food and the colour of your soaps. Collectively, we drive the market the way we want it. **The process of consumer choices is very carefully monitored by manufacturers and advertising.** Don't believe for a moment they don't see your actions to buy red apples over green apples. Big brother *IS* watching but not the way we imagine from George Orwell's predictions. The problem is we don't see or believe in our personal power any more. We think '*my single choice will never be seen or make a difference*'. That is the first trick of the shadows that we need to get over. We have gradually been weaned to surrender our power in the belief that decisions are always made by someone else, whether that's by doctors to look after our health or politicians to govern our lives. In all walks of life we have abdicated responsibility for making our own choices in favour of believing that going with the flow is the best, safest decision. We call it democracy, fashion, trends, popularity and a whole culture of following the crowd is now acceptable and secure in modern life **So what do we do about this?** It really is time for action as individuals, but we need a collective force of many people working together to make changes that get noticed and send a clear message back to manufacturers and policy makers. **How do we do it?** As consumers we need to take back our power, that means understanding that as individuals we constantly have choices that need to be influenced by truthful information and not propaganda. We need

clear thinking followed by proactive responses. It also means we may need to step outside of our personal comfort zone and become an individual in the crowd, instead of blindly following everyone else. If there is a plan to change packaging and waste management from the grass roots upwards, we also need clear guidelines to understand our objectives and targets **Prevention engineering** Usually we look at the end product and centre our attention on waste, rubbish and pollution. This is giving attention to solution based problem solving and not looking at prevention. We need to go back to the source and see that as a consumer, we control what is wasted by our purchasing choices. We are accountable for the life cycle of every item we buy. Let's look at a basic check list of how we purchase:

1. Can we justify its purchase, do we need it?
2. Can we recycle compost, or reuse the packaging?
3. Does it have a reasonable shelf life without going off or spoiling?
4. Is it a convenience food that could be avoided?

In addition to the question on food you may also consider these questions for other consumer goods

1. Is it ethically made and fairly traded?
2. Is it made from non-sustainable materials?
3. Does the manufacturing process involve mining?
4. Does it have a short life expectancy?
5. Does it have built in obsolescence or perceived out dating?

These questions should strongly influence all our purchasing decisions. In addition, we must also be prepared to make a stand to let retailers know about our views. This next step can be a somewhat daunting, as it involves being outspoken in shops. If you buy something and it is a real need, then you should not have to suffer the task of disposing of careless packaging, especially if it is not recyclable. One of the best

ways to send a clear message to retailers and manufacturers is to do something radical like removing the packaging at the point of sale and telling the retailer to either send it back to the producer or recycle/ reuse it themselves responsibly. Another less intimidating option is to return un-recyclable packaging to the retailer another time.

Other actions you can take is to ask the retailer what facilities they have to take back packaging. Some large retailers already offer commercial recycling banks, although these may not include all the plastics that they sell in the store. They may try to refer you to the local council, but you have to make a strong stand that although it may be uncomfortable to them, they have to take responsibility and pass that message back to the producers.

All of these add up to one important end result:

- **We consume according to our needs and the needs of the environment we live in**
- **We only consume goods that have recyclable, compost-able or reusable packaging**
- **We only consume goods that we need and reduce waste to a minimum**
- **We send a strong message to producers that we won't be responsible for their waste.**
- **We shop seasonally and locally, supporting local trade and fresh foodstuffs.**
- **We reject all convenience items with packaging that cannot be reused or recycled.**

We finally get the message, that there is no such place as AWAY!