It is our role as members of global community to meet our needs in a way that does not compromise the ability future generations to meet their needs. Each one of our “throw away” lifestyles occurring on a finite planet collectively affects the health and quality of life of every living thing on this earth. As a society, we need to sustainably manage our materials in order to have the clean air, water, food, and shelter that all current and future humans need for basic survival. Let’s not be the species that became extinct by consuming more than we need, and neglecting to care about the health and environment of our growing population.

**Socially Responsible Solutions for Sustaining Our Resources**

- Everyone involved in each step of a product's life cycle is responsible for minimizing its health and environmental impacts
- Manufacturers would be responsible for the recycling and safe disposal of their products
- Conserves non-renewable energy sources and allows the material economy to have a less damaging impact on the environment
- Consumers have reverence for their products and try to minimize their individual waste contribution

**Toss out Your “Throw-Away” Lifestyle**

Most of the products we use every day were designed to be disposable, destined to become waste. Too many common products are cheaply manufactured abroad and shipped around the world to be sold to us, only to be used briefly before we toss them out on our way to the store to buy more products. We Americans like disposable products because they are cheap and convenient, but often we don’t understand the full price that society pays for that luxury. There are serious economic, environmental, and human health implications from recklessly wasting our resources.

**If you think that waste reduction is just an environmental issue, think again!**

- Disposing of waste is very expensive and your municipality has to pay for the disposal costs either through taxes or user fees
- Your municipality can earn revenue from recycling that could offset the solid waste budget and save your tax dollars
- The recycling industry creates a range of jobs that support the US economy

**Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Management in the United States**

- **Waste-to-Energy**
  - Landfilled: 34%
  - Recycled: 12%
  - 54%

The US EPA estimates that 55-65% of total MSW is residential waste, and 35-45% is generated by commercial and institutional locations such as businesses, schools and hospitals.


**The “Throw-Away” Myth**

**“Away” by Burning:**

- Burning our waste is done either with or without energy recovery. Waste-to-Energy sounds appealing because we have too much trash, and a need for energy. However, that small amount of energy hardly compares to all of the energy it took to extract, process and transport that material in the first place. We would do more energy saving by reducing, reusing, or recycling our stuff. Additionally, according to the US EPA, incineration releases more CO₂ per kilowatt hour than burning natural gas, oil, or coal!

**“Away” by Burying:**

- Over half of our waste is buried in the ground each year, either as toxic compacted material or toxic ash. For these reasons no one wants to live near a landfill, and if we conserve our existing landfill space we will reduce the need to site new ones. Towns and cities can also avoid paying disposal costs by generating less waste. Furthermore, it just plain doesn’t make sense to bury all of our resources that we have already extracted from the earth!
After WWII, the US evolved into a consumer driven economy and our society began to value excess and disposability over thrift and quality. As a result, our municipalities have been burdened with an enormous amount of waste.

In our modern daily lives it is not easy to avoid making waste, even if we try, because most of the products we use were designed to become obsolete almost as quickly as they were wrapped in excessive packaging to grab our consumer attentions. Advertising and social stigmas often reinforce our over-consumptive behavior and make even the savviest shopper buy things they don't need.

Can our society change course and separate success and self-worth from excessive material belongings, only consuming what we need while viewing our waste as a resource? Until we experience a dramatic shift in the way we view our material world, we need to think of economical ways to manage our excessive amounts of waste, one of which is recycling.

Recycling creates a need for public and private businesses that haul, process and broker recycled materials, as well as companies that manufacture and distribute products made with those recycled materials. The recycling industry can support a variety of skilled workers ranging from materials sorters and truck drivers, to brokers and sales representatives, process engineers, chemists, and economists. In short, recycling is actively contributing to America's economic security by creating a range of jobs for millions of people across the country.

*Percentages are a fraction of all U.S. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) material generated in 2010 (Landfilled, Incinerated, Waste-To-Energy, and Recycling)

Source for data used in figure: US EPA, “Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling, and Disposal in the United States, 2010”