

Haileybury MUN

Research report



Environment Commission Committee 2

The question of throwaway culture

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What is a Throwaway Society?

A throw-away society is a human society strongly influenced by consumerism. The term describes a critical view of overconsumption and excessive production of short-lived or disposable items over durable goods that can be repaired.

What are the Problems?

Limited landfill space- The largest landfill in the USA, at Puente Hills, CA, is so large that it must be photographed from the air! Furthermore, it no longer accepts new waste as of Oct 2013 due to overfilling, but it also generates 40 MW of electricity through the breakdown of material and harnessing of landfill gases.

The earth cannot face the population's demands- Globally, we consume 50% more resources than the planet can.

Excessive carbon emissions- excessive consumerism is causing manufacturers to produce more than necessary, thus emitting CO₂ and greenhouse gasses. Some goods and services, such as commercial flying or bovine rearing, emit even more potent greenhouse gases such as methane or do so at higher altitude where greenhouse gases which are normally not that potent such as CO₂ become exponentially more so.

Waste- a 2004 University of Arizona study found that \$43 billion of food is thrown away annually in the USA alone[1]. To make matters worse, economic views on this depend on one's school of thought; militant Keynesians would say that any the consumption still leads to reinvestment and is economically healthy, whereas others such as Austrian school figures would say this represents a malinvestment.

Planned obsolescence- Though Apple Inc. is the main company which comes under fire for adopting this policy of deliberately creating goods which become less desirable over time and so stimulate continual spending, it has been around since the 1920's. Should the doctrine be allowed to celebrate its own centenary?

UN views:

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat's Executive Director said:

"The amount of waste produced by individuals, communities, businesses, institutions, markets and factories continues to grow tremendously. Some of it is recycled but a lot is simply discarded, causing health problems for people, their animals, and polluting our environment".

According to UN-Habitat, 99% of the items we purchase are thrown away within six months.

UN-Habitat, created in 1978 to promote sustainable urbanization on all fronts, is supporting cities more and more in their efforts to improve waste management practices.

References:

1. Foodnavigator-Usa.com. (2004, November 26). US wastes half its food. Retrieved February 2, 2019, from <https://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Article/2004/11/26/US-wastes-half-its-food>