
Inclusion Of Recycling Fee As The Solution For E-waste Environmental Problem

Waste is an issue that most people do not like to think about. Often when we think of recycling we think of it as a chore rather than an opportunity to move towards a solution to a problem. E-waste, or the waste generated by small and large electronic devices, is a growing problem in the world, especially in the U.S. As I read about some of the damages to the environment and the mass amount of improperly disposed e-waste from first world countries, I became discouraged. Throughout this paper I will analyze the issue of e-waste, including its environmental and economic effects in North Dakota, before looking at recycling options for North Dakota, and finally recommending a solution to the problem.

First the environmental effects of e-waste must be addressed and highlighted to give a reason for action. The sheer volume of e-waste generated globally is astonishing and it is not going to lower in the future. There was approximately 44.7 million tons of e-waste was generated in 2016 which was 8% increase since 2014 (UN News, 2017). This waste is not much different than normal waste, except for the fact that it holds valuable materials like gold, silver, copper, platinum, and palladium. So unlike normal waste there is a real economic reason to recycle e-waste. There is one major issue in recycling the metals from the electronic waste, there is “a metric duckload of adhesive” (Bonnington, 2017). This causes recycling to have less of an incentive comparably if the material was easy to separate and sell.

The worldwide problem of e-waste is especially bad in developing nations. There are real signs of environmental damage evidence in Ghana, Africa. The people there are taking in the modern world’s e-waste. “According to the United Nations Environment Programme, 85% of the e-waste dumped in Ghana and West Africa” (Minter, 2016). Astonishing enough, the people there are dependent on bringing in as much of the waste as possible. The reasoning behind this mindset is that they separate adhesives from the valuable metals by very rudimentary tactics, such as simply burning it off. It is obvious that this solution of recycling causes more damage than good, and it is especially dangerous to the people and their living conditions.

The economic values of e-waste have a potential to be an economic benefit. The materials in them could be extracted more efficiently if there was real money coming in for research and development. This is an interesting concept to consider. North Dakota being in a first world country has most of its population owning, buying, and using electronics every day. If North Dakota would decide to intensify the idea of recycling e-waste by charging a recycling fee for electronics. There are three options in this paper that I considered in the recycling efforts for North Dakota. First to have an initial fee on each electronic product, a fee once the product is at the end of its life, and no fee at all.

Having an initial fee at the beginning of a product’s life has a ton of pros from an economical perspective. Recycling companies could use the money to invest into more efficient ways or recycling. It will also help them make a profit with more ease since the volume of valuable metals are decreasing in modern electronics. (Bonnington, 2017). With the time it takes for a product to get to the end of life stage, the money can be invested into designing more recyclable electronics. It also won’t put a choice on recycling electronics, it will just be a part of

the cost.

Considering a fee at the end of the products life does not intensify the consumer. It feels more like it is a choice and it may prolong the problem that we see today. This also coincides the option of no fee at all, the choice not to make a choice. A fee at the end of the products life would cover the costs but would limit available time to invest and will cost more to the consumer. See the calculations at the end of this paper. I will close this analysis of the e-waste issue with a proposed solution. My suggestion would that the retailer selling electronics would have an upfront recycling fee with each electronic device according to size. Factoring in the investment opportunity it will be cheaper for the average person to pay upfront. North Dakota would be on the leading edge for this world issue. It will also alleviate any decision for the consumer at the end of the products life. (763 words)

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