

Savannah McMillion

Ms. Poppe and Mrs. Jonese

AP English

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Improper Waste Disposal

The average person generates 4.6 pounds of trash per day. (Nicholas) With about 8,500 residents in Pocahontas County, we produce on average 39,100 pounds of trash, which is equivalent to the weight of three African Bush Elephants. That number does not include the amount of trash generated by tourists and travelers passing through our county. The overwhelming amount of non-recycled products is increasing in Pocahontas County's forests, streams, fields, and landfill; affecting the environment and residents negatively. Improper waste disposal leads to outstanding amounts of pollution. This problem is not only occurring in Pocahontas County but also worldwide. As a nation alone, the United States produces 220 million tons of trash annually.

Trash goes one of two places; landfills or environmental habitats. Millions of pounds of garbage is thrown into rivers or oceans every year; polluting many main water sources. (Nicholas) Although we do not have oceans here in our county, we have plenty of creeks, rivers, and ground water sources that support our communities. Pocahontas has high littering rates. When driving down the road, ditches that run parallel to the white line are scattered with trash. The trash came from vehicles passing through the area, thrown out the window to land in a habitat that will later be affected. The waste thrown into the ditches is often swept away by running water, joining into larger bodies. All the trash contaminates local creeks, such as Knapp's Creek. Knapp's Creek supplies water to different areas such as the town of Marlinton. To free the water of contaminants and make safe to residents, more chlorine and germ-killing

chemicals are to be added. The process becomes lengthy and water quality as far as taste goes is low.

With waste harming people and aquatic life through river pollution, it also harms the environment in other ways. Both recyclable and non-recyclable items are delivered to the local landfills. Landfills are an ineffective waste management solution. (Action for renewables admin) The overall solution of a landfill is equivalent to taking a problem and putting it off to fix it later. The landfill in Pocahontas County will eventually run out of space. Then what happens? The landfill expands or a new location opens, and the problem is solved? Not entirely, the “elephant graveyards” continue to grow. More trash piles up and the problem is tucked away. The trash that lies within landfills does not decompose quickly. For instance, “It takes 500 years for average sized plastic water bottles to fully decompose.” (Brucker) The average life expectancy is 72.6 years. (Max Roser) So it would take close to 6.9 lifetimes for a plastic bottle to decompose. We place many recyclable items such as plastic bottles in our trash, which ends up in landfills. Instead of disposing or repurposing the items, we continue to repeat the process.

One of the simplest ways to solve improper waste disposal is the classic jingle instilled in our heads, “reduce, reuse and recycle.” “Although 70% of America’s waste is recyclable, we only recycle around 30% of it.” (Brucker) Many items that can be repurposed are thrown as litter or sent to landfills. It would be near impossible to motivate every person in the county to recycle but if the county in general would work together, a difference could be made. The solution I propose is recycling bins at all public places and businesses. The number of items saved would substantially change the number of items sent to our landfill. I could organize a group to pick up the recycled items on a weekly schedule. We could then deliver the items to the closest recycling center. For Pocahontas County that would be Arbovale in Greenbank for

aluminum, and plastic in Harrisonburg. Plastic items can also be brought to the green boxes around the county that have special trailers or bins. The same is true for cardboard and other items. Instead of making longer trips to the recycling centers ourselves, we could drop items off locally.

Another way to save the unnecessary pollution targets the littering aspect. Law enforcement should crack down on the amount of littering that occurs. With such a large county, this solution is hard to put into action because our law enforcement is stretched thin. I cannot control something out of my reach, but I can develop alternate solutions. I can speak on the effects which result from littering and how harmful it could potentially be. People do not realize all of the effects that come from throwing trash on the side of the road. If I could relate how littering affects their own lives, they may think twice before they act. This could be from posting flyers in public areas, putting pamphlets in mailboxes, or public speaking in general. Another solution could be organizing community clean ups. A group of volunteers could go out monthly and pick up garbage. I know inmates are already required by the state to do this job for community services hours, but it is not possible for them to do the entire county. We as citizens could do a community service project that benefits residents further than most realize. Many young people could also gain these hours to put towards requirements in college or jobs.

The last solution I propose to start changing the world, starting here in Pocahontas County is changing the items used and how we dispose of them. One of the simplest and most beneficial ways is a compost pile. Our county is largely compiled of farmers and gardeners. With compost piles, we can recycle our own items and put them towards the food we grow. Composts take up limited space and repurpose thrown away foods, papers, and biodegradables.

We can then apply the compost to our own soil to help richen the ground and grow crops. The items are nontoxic and save space in our landfill. I just have to spread the word.

The problems and solutions above do not only target Pocahontas County but the world in a whole. If we want to ensure healthy environmental habits, we must practice them and spread the word unto others. You cannot make a change if you never take action, so let us start here.

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