

What is held against plastic can be a criticism of paper as well. Children uncomfortable with using plastic might want to ask why its use is so common in contemporary society. Plastic packaging limits breakage and spoilage, and makes it possible to distribute foods and medicines over greater distances. at significantly lower cost. Plastic can create strong but lightweight packaging for everything from candies and soft drinks to vitamins and vegetables that would otherwise require tremendous expenditures of natural resources. Do not these benefits offset, at least in part, the environmental concerns about disposal?

Consider aseptic packaging, the synthetic packaging for the "juice boxes" so many children bring to school with their lunch. One criticism of aseptic packaging is that it is nearly impossible to recycle yet on almost every other count, aseptic packaging is environmentally preferable to the packaging alternatives. Not only do aseptic containers not require refrigeration to keep their contents from spoiling, but their manufacture requires less than one-tenth the energy of making. What is true for juice boxes is also true for other forms of synthetic packaging. The use of polystyrene,

which is commonly (and mistakenly) referred to as "Styrofoam," can reduce food waste dramatically due to its insulating properties. (Thanks to these properties, polystyrene cups are much preferred over paper for that morning cup of coffee.) AS' documented in SCIENCE magazine, a polystyrene cup can be produced with one-sixth the physical material, one-12 the steam, and one-36th the electricity of its paper counterpart. It is no wonder that polystyrene cups are as much as 60-percent less expensive. It should also be noted that, contrary to popular perceptions, the production of polystyrene has not required the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) for years, and thus poses no threat to the ozone layer.

The environmental benefits of plastic are demonstrated every day as over a million American students receive their milk from plastic, pillow-shaped pouches that require less material to produce than the conventional milk carton and that create 70 percent less waste by volume. Indeed plastic is typically less bulky than other forms of packaging, and therefore reduces the

Environmental education for 'eco-smart' children

By Jonathan H. Adler

amount of solid waste disposal.

Many environmental leaders now recognize that the plastic versus paper decision is not as clear-cut as they once supposed. As John Ruston of the Environmental Defence Fund acknowledged to the "New York Times," "I don't think we have strong evidence that one is better than the other." Nonetheless, anti-plastic messages are still pushed to many school-age children as part of environmental education.

3: There Is Too Much Garbage

The popular children's book "50 Simple Things

Solid Waste Solutions instructs children on how to establish school recycling programs because "overflowing landfills are threatening Mother Earth." In New Hampshire, as teacher's guide produced by the state for Earth Day 1990 calls for students to write to companies complaining about "excess packaging," and the EPA's solid waste curriculum even claims that the growing "garbage crisis" is a problem that "threatens to weaken our cities and consume valuable portions of our natural resource base." Many children's environmental concerns are based upon the underlying assumption that too much waste is being created and that there is no place to put it.

However, there is ample space in which to dispose of America's garbage through landfilling, should such an approach be desired. As the research of A. Clark Wise, man of Resources for the Future has demonstrated, all of the solid waste produced in America in the next 1,000 years could easily fit in a single landfill accounting for less than one-10th of

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Kids Can Do To Save the Earth" declares, "We are making so much garbage that in many places there is not enough room to bury it all." Another Earth Works publication, "Kid Heroes of the Environment," claims that "America faces a 'garbage crisis'; we're running out of places to dump our trash." A handbook produced by the Council for

garbage will actually become an important commodity. What more, should landfill space ever truly become scarce, the resulting increase in the costs of waste disposal would encourage individuals to reduce the amount of waste they produce and develop alternative waste disposal options.

It is important to remember that human activity has always involved the production of waste, and that efforts to reduce, or even eliminate, must ultimately come at the expense of much human activity. Product packaging may end up in the trash heap, but during its life it also serves important functions such as the preservation and protection of perishable goods. As long as society has ample ability to dispose of the waste it produces, there seems to be little reason to worry children about a supposed garbage "crisis."

4: Pesticides Are Always

Bad "ABC's for a Better Planet," a children's book featuring the immensely popular Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, recommends that children "get folks to buy fruits and vegetables that are grown organically—that is, without chemical pesticides. Organically grown stuff may not look as perfect, but it tastes great—and it's good for you."

one percent of the United States. This landfill would be approximately 44 miles on each side and only 100 feet deep. If there is more than enough space to dispose of America's garbage, can we really say that there is too much trash? Given that landfilling is significantly less expensive than most other disposal options, advocating that landfilling not be used that more money will be spent on waste disposal and less will be available to spend on other things. Some communities have even discovered that modern landfills can be a welcome addition to the neighborhood, adding jobs and economic resources without producing the environmental hazards and aesthetic objections that accompanied the dumps of the past.

While landfilling remains an environmentally and economically viable option, other methods of waste disposal are continually being developed. One increasingly attractive approach is the development of "waste-to-energy" facilities, whereby garbage can be turned into a source of energy. As more communities begin to rely upon this approach to waste disposal,