Revolution Of Recycling In Europe: Sweden's Experience

Introduction

As time goes by, in every corner of the world, people are producing more and more waste because of some certain reasons. We think the main reason is just because of increasing standards of living. Producing more and more waste can be considered as a potential environmental catastrophe. So, if it has negative effects to our environment, is there any way to avoid from waste? Yes, there is, it can be reduced by a number of steps, including recycling. To begin with, we want to explain the exact meaning of recycling. Recycling, recovery of waste materials to use a new product. Some years ago, people did not give much attention In this case you might ask, “Do we really need to recycle to save our environment?”, the answer is “Yes”. As by recycling we can reduce air and water pollution, save energy, protect the environment and of course we can help our economy. Now I will give you some examples to prove my answer. First of all, recycling helps us to convert our used products to a new and useful one. In other words, recycling is very important and useful for the environment. Since we are saving resources and are sending less trash to the environment, then it means we are reducing air and water pollution. Now let’s talk about how we can save energy by recycling. During the manufacturing process, if we use recycled materials, we use considerably less energy than that required to produce new products from raw materials. According to the facts which mentioned above, there is a possibility to save energy, improve the economy and save the environment just help of recycling. However, there are some people in our society who are not likely to recycle. They think that there is no difference in whether they recycle or not. But, fortunately, in many countries, recycling has been made a legal requirement, and we really endorse this position. In this paperwork, we will talk about some European countries which are recycling and are not recycling, and how recycling is affecting to the countries economy!

Revolution of recycling in Europe

First of all, we want to focus on the history of recycling in Europe, how it was created and how it did work. In the early 19th century, factories and manufactured products were developing around cities, and even the urban population was growing really fast. At that time people did not pay much attention to sanitary concerns. But discovering of bacteria made everybody to think about the meaning of bacteria and sanitary concerns. Finally, in 1870 in Paris, the deposit of waste on the streets was prohibited by the governmental decree and people were forced to procure a personal recipient. After that some special people were sent to the streets of European cities to control and collect any recyclable materials. Then the first recycling factories made their appearance. During World War 1, recycling was very essential in Europe. For example, they collected any kind of scrap metal to make a raw material and melted them to make weapons. The same story continued during World War 2. But demand for recycling raised year by year. After the 1970s, people became aware of environmental issues. Since then, recycling started to be studied and improved.

And now let us talk about how recycling is working in Europe now.

In this graph, we can simply see that Germany recycles more than any other country not only in

Europe but also in the world. According to Eunomia, the environmental consultancy that compiled the report, all countries which are shown on the graph have in common government policies to encourage people to recycle. For example, good funding for recycling or making it easy for people to recycle waste and so on. But many countries have their own ambitious recycling targets including Wales. Wales is going to achieve zero waste by 2050, and EU is also supporting this aim.

The real recycling leaders

According to the reports, Sweden is recycling almost all of its waste, and it is showing about 50%. When it comes to Singapore, it recycles over 60% of its waste, but Eunomia calculates that almost half of them were a commercial and industrial waste. Commenting on the findings, Rob Gillies, report author and managing consultant at Eunomia, said: “It’s important to note this research has been carried out so we can identify who the real leaders in recycling are, to share best practice by shining a spotlight on what these countries are doing.'

What happens to recycled waste in Europe?

Almost all of the recycled waste are shipped to Asia. But, nowadays, China, the world’s largest importer and recycler of metal, plastic and scrap metals, has decided not to import “foreign garbage”, and they banned 24 types of waste. This decision forces every European country to recycle more of their own waste.

In recent years, Europe recycles 30% of its plastics, meanwhile, the US recycles 9%, but still a huge amount of waste is in landfills and in the oceans.

How we can encourage people to recycle?

Obviously, future of our earth is just in our hands, and from the facts mentioned above, we can realize that how recycling is important to our environment and even to our economy. Unfortunately, as all we know, the number of people who are not likely to recycle is not much less than number of people who actually do recycle. In this case, there is a proper question, “How can we encourage people to recycle?”. Let us focus on Germany, what kind of method or policy they are using, as Germany recycles more than any other country in the world. There is only one “Secret Weapon” which Germany uses. “The Secret Weapon” is paying money for people who actually do recycle. It sounds weird but it does work very well. Let us compare Germans method with Americans one. If you are recycling in America, then you are getting back a nickel, but in Germany if you do the same, you are getting twenty-five cents! It means that ten empty bottles from water or juice you bought last week nets you 2.5 euros off your next grocery bill. So which one would you prefer getting a nickel or twenty-five cents?!

Sweden`s experience

Everyone produces garbage, Sweden is no different but it's what they do with that waste that is a bit unusual. Swedes produce a fair amount of waste approximately 460 kilos per person a year which amounts to 4.4 million tons. Every year less than one percent goes to landfill. With recycling and sorting of garbage a way of life Sweden is able to convert much of its waste into

energy. In Helsingborg in the south of Sweden about 40% of households get their district heating from garbage incinerated at the brand-new plant. The waste the plant uses there comes from two different sources: households and industrial waste. A good number to remember is that three tons of waste contains as much energy as one tonne of fuel. So there is a lot of energy in waste. In Sweden they incinerate 2.2 million tons of household waste in the plants every year. We should copy what Sweden does with its waste. They burn a lot of it and turn into a energy. This so-called waste-to-energy process is becoming new go-to solution in a lot of countries. If this would be a good solution for other countries` garbage crisis? Sweden has become known as the darling of the waste world, according to the government they recycle 99% of their waste. They are so successful with their waste, now they are importing it from other countries. Sweden is turning other countries` trash into cash. Sweden makes around a hundred million dollars a year from this trade. They mix the imports with local garbage and incinerate in 34 plants dotted around the country. They say this is better than other countries approach of burying waste in landfill. Sweden banned landfill many years ago. However, there are some problems to burn the waste as well. For example, co2 emissions, carbon dioxide emissions. Sometimes it is worse to burn plastics than actually burying them. When plastic incinerated, it generates carbon dioxide emissions immediately whereas if it is burnt it will take long time before they degrade. But there more problems with landfills, it takes up space, you might have leachate coming out of toxic at chemicals etc. So, recycling is always more beneficial both from an energy and electricity perspective and from the perspective of emissions.

Sweden sees itself as a leader in the recycling world. Because its citizens are so willing to recycle their waste. For instance, families collect their trash separately and carry them to local trash collection businesses. They look at it as their duty. In a result, it is leading to higher rates of recycling. Moreover, In Sweden, producers that make the packaging are responsible for its recycling. The rates for glass and paper are sky-high but for plastics there are some real problems. For that reason, there is biggest plastic recycling company called Swerec. This company claims that they are recycling more than a third of the sorted plastic and rest they send to incinerators.

On the contrary, Sweden dedicated to use this energy from burnt waste to heating rather than electricity. On this point, is Sweden really good example for other countries where they do not have central heating capacity? Does that mean it`s less efficient for others to invest in waste-to-energy for instance? Unfortunately yes, if they only use electricity of course, the energy efficiency in the plant will be much lower than what we can find in Sweden and other parts of the world where they have central heating so that will make the whole calculation less efficient. But still we have to take in account that what is the alternative. In summer time, in Sweden, most of the plants are turned off and that`s because nearly 90% of the energy from waste-to-energy is used for heating. All in all, Sweden is a perfect example for other countries in dealing with waste..

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