

On November 13th, 2000

VOTE

Kathy Gastle

for **Mayor**

There's a better way



Web-site: www.kathygastle.com

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Science Matters

- by David Suzuki



Excessive packaging causing problems to our environment

The other day I received a disposable piece of cloth-like material in the mail, wrapped in several layers of plastic and foil. Rather than using a rag to wipe up dust, the package said, I should be using these things. One-time use. Just wipe it and throw it away.

But where does it go? In spite of all the environmental awareness that has occurred over the past 30 years, people still conveniently forget that everyday items that we use and toss in the bin have to be made from something and go somewhere. A great number of these products don't even make our lives any easier or better. They just take up space in delivery vehicles, on store shelves, in our cupboards and ultimately in landfills.

Look at Toronto. With local landfills brimming, city council decided to stuff its garbage into an abandoned mine north of the city, even though the mine would most assuredly leak toxins from the garbage into the surrounding soils and groundwater. Fortunately, that deal fell through. But the alternative isn't much better - sending 250 garbage trucks to Michigan every day!

Vancouver, meanwhile, is in the middle of a garbage strike. Garbage bins all over the city are overflowing with trash. In parks, plastic bags of dog poop picked up by owners are simply dropped near overflowing trash cans. The owners continue strolling as if it disappeared.

But it doesn't disappear. All the stuff we buy and throw away comes from the Earth and goes back to the Earth. Most people know this already. We know that the products we buy are made from natural resources like wood, metal, water and oil. And we know that all these products, from dust wipes to coffee cups, computers to cars, all end up back in the environment - either in our soil, in our air or in our water. Too often, they end up as pollution and it affects us all.

That's why Canadians have embraced recycling and reduced the amount of trash per person going to the dump. But our population is increasing, bringing with it more waste. And creating products in the first place still requires lots of energy - so does recycling. Right now, most of that energy comes in the form of polluting fossil fuels. So it isn't enough to

merely put out the blue box once a week if we still buy, buy, buy like there's no tomorrow. Often, the most distinctive feature of the things we buy is the packaging, which serves no practical use, but ends up in the garbage.

It's not that we can't have a high standard of living and still reduce our impact on the Earth. It's just that we've become so used to having cheap resources at our disposal that wasteful consumption and packaging, inefficient energy use, and inefficient city and building design have become the norm.

For example, in spite of technological advances, the average new vehicle today burns 13 per cent more gasoline than it did 10 years ago! Meanwhile, huge sections of newspapers encourage us to buy more vehicles, especially large inefficient vehicles like SUVs, which cost more than the average Canadian's entire annual salary. And the ads seem to work. More Vancouver families are buying second and even third vehicles, increasing traffic by eight per cent in four years, while the population has increased by just four per cent.

So we buy, and then we complain. We complain about traffic. We complain about bridges being upgraded to handle more traffic. We complain about the taxes needed to pay for it all. We complain about smog. And we shake our heads when our children suffer asthma attacks and dead whales loaded with toxins wash upon the beach.

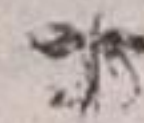
Maybe if we stopped complaining for a minute, we'd realize that all these problems aren't someone else's responsibility. They are the result of all that we do.

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