

Opinion Performance Task: Keeping the Community Clean

Student Directions

Task:

Your class is studying about the environment and recycling. You are given four sources about community service and recycling efforts.

*Read the sources carefully to **write an opinion essay** in which you give your opinion about whether the school should agree to clean a section of a highway or host a technology recycling day as your school's community service project. Make sure you clearly state your opinion and write several paragraphs supporting your opinion with reasons and details from the sources.*

Sources for Performance Task:

Source #1

This article from a travel brochure is about programs that help keep highways clean.

Keep Our Roadsides Beautiful

Driving along America's highways is one of our nation's favorite pastimes. Many Americans love to drive for sightseeing, vacations, and relaxation.

Today, there are more than 4 million miles of roads and streets in the United States. Drivers and passengers can enjoy mile after scenic mile of grass, trees, waterways, farms, forests, wildflowers, and wildlife.

But imagine if those "scenic" miles were cluttered with bags, cans, and all kinds of trash and junk. This might be hard to imagine today, yet it was very common 50 years ago.

In the late 1950s, the United States was considering building a highway system. Before then, America was a spider web of roads that twisted through small towns from coast to coast. The proposed highways would link major cities so people could have quick and easy access to airports, landmarks, and other key locations. As these highways were built and more vehicles traveled them, they became littered with all kinds of unsightly trash. It was ugly to look at and a danger to wildlife. But what could be done to solve the problem?

On September 16, 1965, President Johnson signed the Highway Beautification Act. He believed that "beauty belongs to all the people." President Johnson wanted to limit billboards and other advertising along America's highways. He also wanted to eliminate junkyards and other roadside messes. The Highway Beautification Act was a big success. The roadways were cleaner and safer—and the people of America were participating in the process. But there was *still* work to do!

In 1985, the people of Texas had an idea to address roadside littering in their own state. They developed a campaign called "Adopt-a-Highway." The program encouraged groups of volunteers to work together to keep small sections of Texas highways free of litter. In return for volunteering, the groups could put their names on

specially designed blue-and-white signs posted along the roadways.

Texas's Adopt-a-Highway program was so successful that other states wanted to start similar programs. Over the years, the program has spread to many other states. Though the overall goal remains the same, each state can design a plan that fits its own needs. Celebrities and corporations joined forces to encourage everyone to support Adopt-a-Highway and other programs in their own communities.

The next time you travel America's highways, enjoy the beautiful scenery. But remember all the ideas, innovations, and hard work that went into making it a safe, clean, and healthy place to travel too!

References

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President Lyndon Johnson Signs the Highway Beautification Act. (nd). *History*. Retrieved from: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/president-lyndon-johnson-signs-the-highway-beautification-act>

How to Adopt a Highway. (nd). *Texas Department of Transportation*. Retrieved from: <http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/get-involved/volunteer/adopt-a-highway.html>

Source #2

This article from *Highlights for Children* magazine is about a man who has inspired people to join him in keeping shorelines free of litter.

Tackling the Trash

by Jill Esbaum

Not many people would spend their free time picking up other people's litter. But Chad Pregracke has spent most of the past five years doing just that along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Illinois Rivers.

Why?

Chad grew up in a house alongside the Mississippi. He loved to fish and camp on the river's wooded islands. That's when he first noticed the junk dotting its shoreline. Many other boaters and campers used the river, too. Unfortunately, some of them didn't care where they threw their trash.

Spring floods added to the clutter. When flood waters went down, they left behind everything from tin cans to 55-gallon steel drums, from tires to TV sets.

“It was getting worse every year,” Chad says. “And nobody was cleaning it up.”

In May of 1997, Chad came home from college for summer vacation. As usual, he was disgusted by the junk that littered the riverbanks near his hometown of East Moline, Illinois. But this time, instead of wondering why someone else didn’t clean it up, he decided to tackle a few miles of shoreline himself.

With only a flat-bottomed boat, a wheelbarrow, and a sturdy pair of gloves, he motored up and down the river. Whenever he spotted trash, he pulled to shore and picked it up. When his boat was full, he took the load to a landfill. Chad even took pictures of the junk he hauled away. “I thought it might be fun to see how much trash I could pick up,” he says.

Soon the riverbanks near his hometown were litter--free. And Chad was hooked. “I really enjoyed it,” he says. “I could see the results day after day. It made me feel good to help my community.” So he kept going, sleeping under a tarp each night.

But Chad’s money was disappearing fast. Food, gasoline for his boat, landfill charges, and film costs were gobbling up his resources. He wondered if others would help support his cleanup.

First Chad talked to government agencies like the National Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. While happy about his work, they didn’t have much money to donate.

So Chad called area businesses. He explained about growing up beside the river, the mess it had become, and his determination to clean it up. Most companies wouldn’t help either. But finally one company decided to lend a hand. Chad got his first small grant and the encouragement he needed to find others to help as well.

Chad began visiting other companies in person and found that his careful record keeping paid off. People couldn’t help being impressed by his enthusiasm, or by the pictures of the junk he’d already hauled away. The next year, Chad received enough money to finish his summer’s work with several volunteers to help him. In two years he raised enough money to buy two more boats and hire five helpers for the next summer.

In 1998 , Chad’s goal was to clean 1,000 miles of shoreline. Beginning in northern Iowa, he and his crew slowly worked their way south. Their final destination was St. Louis, Missouri. Along the way, Chad had to receive permission from each town to pile his junk in a parking lot or field. When he finished each area, he trucked the trash to the nearest landfill.

As the hot summer wore on, the work became more difficult. The farther south they traveled, the more trash littered the shore. One mile of shoreline was so full of old tires it took more than a month to clean— one small boatload at a time. Sheltered only by tents and tarps, Chad and his crew battled mosquitoes and summer storms. By summer’s end only Chad and one helper remained on the job. When cold weather forced them to stop, they were just fifty miles from St. Louis.

Chad didn’t spend the winter months catching up on sleep. He needed to raise more money. Part of the

money would go toward finishing his work near St. Louis. The rest would fund his next project, cleaning the 270-mile shoreline of the Illinois River.

Chad also traveled from town to town. He spoke at schools, churches, and town halls. He shared his story with community groups, conservation clubs, and Scout troops. He asked them to help keep the river clean.

People were eager to help. Someone even offered him a used houseboat for free. There was only one catch: it was resting on the muddy bottom of the Illinois River. "It was a real mess," Chad remembers. "The most totally trashed thing you've seen in your life."

After a lot of repair work and elbow grease, *The Miracle* became the crew's floating home and headquarters—a big step up from tents and tarps.

In 2000, Chad began hosting community-wide cleanup days in cities along the Mississippi. "I want to get as many people involved as possible," he says.

Toward that goal, Chad encourages individuals and community groups to participate in his Adopt-a-Mississippi-Mile program, pledging to keep a mile of shoreline litter-free.

Chad did return to college in 2001 and received his associate's degree. But for now, Chad is devoting himself to the river, and cleaning it up has taken over his life.

But he doesn't mind one bit. "I work with good people who have become my best friends," he says. "I love it."

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Source #3

This article from *Time for Kids* magazine explains why electronic waste is a problem and gives possible solutions to this problem.

Tech Trash: New Technology Causes Trouble for Recyclers

by Cameron Keady

Picture a wasteland of old computer monitors and TVs stretching as far as the eye can see. Imagine towers of boxes, all of them filled with broken glass and discarded electronic devices.

Technology dumps like this can be found in communities across the country. Experts say that landfills and warehouses will overflow unless a plan for the disposal and reuse of electronics is put into place. "We can't put electronics and glass aside and tell ourselves we'll deal with them later," Lauren Roman, managing director of TransparentPlanet told TFK Time[Time For Kids.]. "Later has been going on for a long time and the

piles continue to grow.” Roman’s group works to improve the disposal of electronic waste. She says about 660 million pounds of tech trash is produced each year in the United States.

The Trouble with Tubes

What’s behind the tech trash pile-up? Years ago, major advances were made in computer and television technology. Manufacturers began producing devices like flat-paneled LCDs and plasma screen monitors. These new products provide a clearer image and take up less space than older models. “Flat-paneled plasmas and LEDs are putting bulky, glass-based technologies out of the market,” says Jason Linnell of the Electronics Recycling Coordination Clearinghouse.

The new electronics are built with materials that are difficult to recycle. In addition, the new products have decreased the demand for recycled parts from the older monitors and screens. Older, bulkier computer monitors and TVs used glass-based components called cathode ray tubes, or CRTs.

CRTs have a high lead content and can be environmentally hazardous if not recycled properly. If crushed and put in landfills, the lead from CRTs could seep into groundwater and rivers, contaminating the water supply. For many years, plants and recycling programs safely processed CRTs. The recycled CRTs were reused in the construction of new monitors.

Monitors being made today do not use glass tubes. “People are returning old-style TVs with CRTs, but no new ones are being made,” said Linnell. This is creating an imbalance in the amount of glass being disposed of and recycled properly. Many recycling companies have shut down. Others no longer have the resources or space to process these materials. This results in stockpiling.

Be a Part of the Solution

Experts say there are ways to safely and responsibly address the tech-trash problem. Barbara Kyle is the national coordinator of the Electronics TakeBack Coalition. The organization encourages people to donate their old, but functioning, electronics to charities or neighbors who will use them. “It’s better for the planet if we keep using an electronic for as long as it keeps working,” Kyle told TFK in an e-mail. “But many times, we stop using it even though it still works, because we got a newer product.”

Students can also be a part of the solution. Schools can organize take-back programs, or set up recycling projects to collect used electronics. They can also work with responsible electronics recyclers, called e-Stewards, to handle their old devices. Many electronics manufacturers also provide a return program where consumers can send back devices that they no longer use. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 25 states now have laws that deal with the disposal and recycling of electronics. Most of these laws require manufacturers to pay for collection and recycling at the end of a product’s life.

Through these various programs and organizations, consumers can reduce tech trash and become part of the solution. . . .

Source #4

This article from *Odyssey* magazine is about the importance of recycling computer waste.

Tech-Trash Tragedy

by Liam O'Donnell

In our wired world, technology moves at a laser-fast pace. Every day, a new gadget arrives and promises to bring us the future, today. In the race for faster computers and more powerful gadgets, it's easy to forget about yesterday's high-tech wonders.

Unfortunately, many times used computers and gadgets end up in landfills across the country. Each year, we throw away millions of computers. . . . That is not good news for the environment. To make our gadgets work, many of them use materials like lead and mercury. When mercury and lead end up in a landfill, they spread poisons into the earth, water, and air for miles around. This is called e-waste— —and it's becoming a big pollution problem around the world.

Big problems call for big solutions, so adults and kids from dozens of countries are working hard to clean up our e-waste. And you can help, too.

Turning Old Into New

The trick to reducing e-waste is to catch it before it gets into the landfill. That's why the seventh-grade students at Cityside Middle School in Zeeland, Michigan, organized a computer drop-off event. They put up posters and spread the word around the town, telling people to bring out their old computers.

And the people of Zeeland got the message. They dropped off dozens of old computers, monitors, and printers at the school. Craig Greshaw, the school's computer teacher who helped organize the event, believes that knowing about computers goes beyond surfing the Web. "Part of that is learning about the chemicals inside the computers and what needs to be done with them to keep them safe," he told the *Holland Sentinel* during the recycling drive. With their school gym filled with old computers, the students were ready for the next step in cleaning up the high-tech trash: turning old computers into new ones.

That's where companies like RePC step in. The Seattle company takes e-waste and turns it into e-gold. "Almost all of the parts of a computer can be reused or recycled," says Mark Dabek, owner of RePC. Any computer parts that can't be reused or sold get recycled in a way that is better for the environment. "The circuit boards are sent to a circuit board recycler that chops them and sends them to a facility with a very, very hot furnace called the 'reactor,'" Dabek says. After the computer parts are safely crushed and burned, their raw materials can be reused to make everything from appliances to office buildings.

Sometimes you can make a new computer from the parts of an old computer. Called refurbishing, it's what the tech whizzes at RePC do best. Buying a refurbished computer is a lot cheaper than buying a new one. But who wants a computer made up of old parts?

A lot of people, actually. Places like schools and community centers are often short on money, but need computers to help them get things done. . . .

Computers aren't the only technology that can be reused. Last year, schools in New Mexico gave old cell phones a new lease on life while also helping to raise money for charity. The students collected 11 garbage bags of old cell phones, sold them to a cell phone refurbishing company, donated the money to charity, and helped keep the environment clean—all at the same time. . . .

Computers are an important part of our wired world. It's up to us to reduce the amount of pollution they create on our planet. Talking to others about e-waste is a great way to start tackling the problem. Speak to your teacher about organizing a computer collection drive at your school. Next time your baseball team is raising money, try collecting old cell phones. By working together for a clean future, we can reduce the amount of e-waste on our planet.

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