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## A Teen's Perspective on Sustainability

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*Girls Worldwide Podcast*

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## A Teen's Perspective on Sustainability

### Abstract

A teenager's view on sustainability and recycling with insights from her home.

### Keywords

sustainability, environment, STEAM

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## **A Teen's Perspective on Sustainability**

Sofia Rodriguez

Sustainability. What pops into your head when you hear that word? For many of us, sustainability means recycling, but what is “recycling” and where do “recycled” materials actually go? As of 2015, 79% of plastics produced in the world that we “recycle” have ended up in our landfills (Geyer, 2017) which threatens our ability to maintain an environment necessary for the survival of humans and other organisms, not the intention of sustainability. Even scarier, an analysis of US export records shows that the equivalent of 19,000 shipping containers of plastic recycling per month is now stranded here in the US and eventually ends up in landfills (McCormick 2019). As more municipalities are forced to deal with their trash, they have realized that much of the “recycling” we throw away is completely unrecyclable. This fact about the challenges of recycling was left out when they were teaching us about the importance of the three R's; Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. Now that the number of active landfills has decreased from 8,000 to only 3,200, this leaves us to wonder what will happen once they are all full.

What do we do with all the plastic? We could start burning our plastic, but that would lead us to deal with the problems related to toxic gas emissions like dioxins, furans, mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (better known as BCPs) released into our air posing threats to humans, other animals, and vegetation. Many environmentalists are pushing for bans on many types of plastic, and some manufacturers have begun to develop more sustainable packaging. More people in communities have begun to embrace environmentally friendly habits. This movement

is something that is inspiring about our society, how even in times where no solution seems to be in sight, together, we find ways to forge ahead. This is where creativity meets science.

This reflects the thousands, if not millions, of people with wonderful ideas that exist to help to save our earth. For example, one source of plastic pollution comes from single-use water bottles, but to help solve that problem, water blobs were created. They are round single servings of water that instead of surrounded by plastic, use brown algae and calcium carbonate to create an edible film and are have great potential to help reduce plastic waste. It not only uses an ingenious idea to solve a problem but from an aesthetic angle, the design is very sophisticated and an ideal example of STEAM. Another innovation with the potential to have a positive impact on plastic waste is Mr. Trash Wheel, a solar-powered trash interceptor that is used in Baltimore, Maryland to help pick up the trash in the Chesapeake Bay and thus far has removed over 999 tons of trash. By using sophisticated design, using STEAM, recycling can move into the next century and can tackle the current era's challenged.

These innovations are examples of how we can combat problems when we work together. This promotes a sense of hope that we will be able to solve this waste problem and create a better future for incoming generations. To make a difference, we do not need to come up with amazing ideas although they are great. There are many simple things we can do to help the earth. Take this 15-year-old, I have introduced my family to composting. Compost is made from the food scraps that are biodegradable like eggshells, and from things that grow right out of the ground like fruits, veggies, and more these can be turned into the soil that you garden with. By just collecting my food scraps and then dropping them off at local gardens, we are helping the Earth by reducing our waste from our entire household, and so can you! It just takes initiative.

Geyer R, Jambeck JR, Law KL. Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. *Science Advances*. 2017, 3 (7), e1700782.

[McCormick](#) E, Simmonds C, Glenza J, and Gammon K. Americans' plastic recycling is dumped in landfills, investigation shows. 2019. June 21.