

The Environment and Big Business

Since the rise of environmental awareness, business and industry have always considered environmentalism a waste of time, only getting in the way of profits and production. From the perspective of business, environmentalists push for regulations and restrictions on businesses which cost them more money and frequently restrict some of their practices. What business and the economy doesn't know is that they can actually save money by being environmentally responsible, while protecting the very resources they depend on. The protection of the environment not only has intrinsic value, but also economical value. Business and industry, can also benefit. These factors can lead to a newly developed economy that protects what it needs instead of destroying it. Despite historical differences between advocates of business and the environment, the fact is the two can and must utilize each other for the future success of both.

It is important, in order for the economy to see the environment worth something, to put an economic value on it. For this reason, a group of scientists for the Center for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment have developed an economic valuation for the environment. According to them, it is necessary to impute a value to environmental goods or services (Pearce et al, online). This value is necessary because the economy needs to see that the protection of the environment can prove cost worthy to business and industry. The purpose of valuation is to show true costs of using up scarce environmental resources. It is a way for environmentalists and economists to put a dollar figure on the services the environment provides. Robert Costanza, an ecological economist from the University of Maryland, has done just this. The estimate of services provided by ecosystems worldwide is 33 trillion dollars annually, surpassing the gross national product of all the countries on earth combined by eight trillion dollars (Zimmer 105). The environment provides services not only commercially, such as timber, but also in less visible ways. For instance, forests protect from soil erosion, which proves costly to correct. With these facts in mind, depleting ecosystems and resources proves costly, while protection them can only save money.

Business and the American economy has much to gain by altering their current practices. One prime example of how protection the environment can prove beneficial to a company is a program created by 3M called Pollution Prevention Pays. This program creates incentives to prevent hazardous and toxic wastes by changing processes, redesigning equipment, and recovering waste for reuse or recycling. Since the program was designed in 1975, 3M has been able to save over \$537 million, while reducing its air pollution by 10,000 tons, its wastewater by one billion gallons and its solid waste by 410,000 tons (Hawken 61). This is one example of a business making money from preventative waste, while becoming environmentally responsible. While at the same time, not being environmentally responsible can cause businesses to lose money. The cost of cleaning up waste can be extremely expensive, while reducing waste and recycling can prove worthwhile. From a surface view, it would appear that the American economy doesn't need to make any change to its current practices. After all, the U.S. is one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The problem rests in the foundation of the economy. America was founded on and flourishes because of its natural resources, most of them non-renewable. These resources, such as petroleum, natural gas and timber, will run out someday, it is inevitable. Research of programs to prevent this or to incorporate alternate forms of energy have barely been researched. Perhaps the reason for this is that actions that deplete lands and species are rewarded in the market, because they are less expensive, while actions that preserve them are not (Schuss and Western 329). It is much less expensive, for instance, to buy a car that is fueled by gasoline than to buy a car that runs on hydrogen, even though hydrogen is a renewable resource and produces barely any waste.

As Paul Hawken, an environmentalist and author of "Ecology of Commerce", explains, "the single most damaging aspect of the present economic system is that the expense of destroying the earth is largely absent from prices set at the marketplace" (13). Market prices set for products don't include the cost that future generations will have to pay to clean up the mess the current economy is fueling right now. An economy based on the rapid depletion of its own non-renewable resources is

certainly destined for doom, while protection of these resources will save the businesses or corporations money while protecting what fuels it.

Works Cited

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