

# Laudato Si in Action

## Recycle

In Chapter One of Laudato Si, Pope Francis states:

*We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them. A serious consideration of this issue would be one way of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet, but it must be said that only limited progress has been made in this regard.*

As I mentioned in prior columns, my approach to consumption of resources can be summed up with these five words: reduce, reuse, renew, rethink, and recycle. In prior columns, I discussed reduce and reuse. It's time to talk about **recycle**.

It's not an accident that I put recycle last on my list of words. Certainly, recycling is admirable and you should not throw away recyclable materials. Nor should you muck up your bins by practicing what is called "wishful recycling," when one ignores the rules and throws non recyclable items in the recycling bin according to recent article on kuow.org:

*Industry-wide, an estimated 20 percent of what we recycle is trash, according to the Washington Refuse & Recycling Association.*

Even when you get it right, recycling is not a panacea:

*Alli Kingfisher, recycling coordinator for Washington state, said no one should be too smug about their recycling. "Recycling is only one step above disposal," she said. Don't get her wrong: recycling is important, but it's not the end-all-be-all of green living. "If you really want to increase your overall environmental impact, try to reduce or reuse before you even get to the recycling part," Kingfisher said.*

Are you practicing wishful recycling? Perhaps it is time to reread the Seattle recycling/composting rules and teach your family members (including children) to follow the rules. You can view an online version of the SPU recycling guide at <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SPU/Services/Recycling/EnglishRecyclingdodont.pdf>.

What about reducing your usage of single use items such as plastic water bottles and utensils, even when they are potentially recyclable? When possible, are you using reusable containers and purchasing bulk items that reduce packaging waste?

Reducing your consumption, reusing an item multiple times, or not making a questionable purchase is always better than purchasing an item that can later be recycled. But when you do use a recyclable item, make sure it ends up in the right recycling or compost bin.

Working together, we can help take care of our common home.

**Paul Litwin**