

## The Recycling Scam

Guest: Floy Lilley

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**WOODS:** Suppose a recycling propagandist came to your door. "Here, Floy, we've got these wonderful new recycling bins here for you, and this is really going to help the environment." Suppose you were in a particularly foul mood. What would you say to this person?

**LILLEY:** "Well, what exactly are you paying me for?"

**WOODS:** Okay.

**LILLEY:** They'll say, "Well, I'm not paying you. It's going to cost you to do that." And then I would have to say, "Well, then, whatever it is you want me to put into this wheelie bin should not be there, because it's not a useful resource to humans. If it were, you would be here at my door saying, 'Have you got any aluminum cans? Can I buy them? Have you got some craft cardboard? Can I buy it? Have you got some metals? How about hub caps, anything? Can I buy them?'"

We've been recycling forever. I mean not so many generations ago, essentially, Tom, the only thing in the rubbish dump, the only thing in the pile at all was broken pottery, shards of glass, because absolutely everything else had a useful life in some other way. The rags, all of that. The rag pickers picked them up. All of it had a useful life. And as long as they did, they were recycled, and recycling has a marvelous function in the market itself when it's part of the free market. And everything that can be useful to man is picked up from anything that people dispose of and reuse.

Now if it is not useful to man, then they send around bozos with green and tan and blue and red and yellow wheelie bins and have to mandate. No free market there. Mandate at the force of fines or imprisonment that you do something not natural. Now, why do you go along with that? Why do you do it? Why do we have two, three, four, and five wheelie bins cluttering up our alleyways and making an obstacle to try and even get in the door? I truly believe we only do that because it's been sold to us as a full-time religion. After all, now they don't believe in virgin births. They don't want any virgin materials used like sand to make glass and hydrocarbons to make plastics, but they do seem to believe in quasi-resurrections, I'll call it.

**WOODS:** Let me jump in here. Suppose they came back and said, "All right, look, Dr. Lilley. You've got us. We frankly don't care that much about human welfare and efficiency. What we really care about is trying to keep the landfills from overflowing and sure it might cost something. Rather than showering benefits on mankind immediately, yes we might indeed be expending funds, but we have to do this. Otherwise, we're going to get poison in our well water, or we're going to have garbage overflowing everywhere, and certainly you don't want that."

**LILLEY:** Well, hearing you say, Tom, or man at my back door, that you think we've run out of landfill space essentially—

**WOODS:** I think the general public thinks so.

**LILLEY:** You think so? That could be. I mean if we act so crazy about it like you must recycle then it must be that we don't have any landfill space. But what are the facts about that? Some of the facts are that all the garbage for the next 100 years in America can fit into a space that's 255 feet deep or high and only ten miles down a side. All of the garbage in the U.S. So that's not taking up a huge amount of space and then. don't

we know or maybe we don't know—we should know that landfills aren't the same old landfills that they originally were. Today they have leach bottoms to them. They have containers. They have tops. Some of them are even turned over like compost, and they're now energy-producing plants. Like the large waste management company who is the largest waste manager in the country. Anyway, most of his landfills now are energy-producing plants. They produce methane, and he's got many of them now producing natural gas.

Well, that is extraordinary, and some of those plants of waste management companies are now feeding electricity for 700,000 U.S. homes. When the landfill is finally through creating this energy, essentially, then its useful end life is simply usually something you want, as a park. But we're not running out of landfill space. I do understand how that mainly came about by that silly garbage barge that indicated that it couldn't find a place to land going up and down the East Coast, and then there was a bureaucrat who made hay out of that saying, "Oh, we've run out of landfill. This is horrible." But none of that is true. The landfills today take up most of our garbage, including most of what we recycle. So we're recycling, and yet it's going into the landfill anyway. So we're not running out of landfill space.

**WOODS:** All right, so then if it's not a matter of having to conserve landfill space, and since any of the other claims that they make seem to be false, I guess there's something going on here other than dispassionate science. Is there anything in the recycling mantra that we hear that makes any sense? Because sometimes you'll hear even free-market people say, "Well, sure, it's silly to be recycling glass bottles and plastic this and that, but the aluminum can—it does make sense to recycle the aluminum can." So how do I sort that out, so to speak, and make sense of that?

**LILLEY:** Well, when somebody is willing to pay you for it, that's when it makes sense. So those things will still exist, and those things are the metals for the most part. Some plastic but not much. Now what's happened today is that paper, and especially old newspaper, is old news. We're not using paper as much as we were even four and five years ago, so books and newspapers—they're worthless. They're not to be recycled at all mainly, because if you've got print on any of that you've got to use chemical bath to get the print off of it. And that's even more chemicals and even more waste, so books and newspapers shouldn't be recycled at all. Glass is insignificant and shouldn't be recycled. Just the card, the heavy craft cardboard, metal, and some plastics ought to dominate.

Landfill mining will take place, and there'll be landfill resource companies, and it won't be seen as waste at all. They'll know what's in there, and they'll mine back through it when they need it. But China stopped buying our waste. They stopped buying all our recycled stuff almost nine years ago, and during this economic depression that we're in, Tom—when times were real tough there's less garbage. So there isn't as much garbage going into any of either the recycle bins or the landfills.

**WOODS:** But I think it might be hard for the average person to see why it would be wasteful to take—and I'm just playing devil's advocate here.

**LILLEY:** Sure.

**WOODS:**—To take a glass bottle and not recycle it. Surely, it would be easier to clean an old glass bottle than to create a brand new one.

**LILLEY:** Well, wish away, but it's not. Maybe because most glass is not just clear glass. Much of the glass is mixed, and it's colored and the whole crunching of it, the whole trying to get it back down to its sand—all it is silica dioxide. That's sand. We've got plenty of sand, so there is something that ought to be a virgin birth. We need to just recreate glass out of the sand, and the same is true with plastic. Plastic is just from petroleum byproducts, and to try to separate plastics or recycle them is a very expensive product and process. So recycling for all glass and paper—paper, of course, is just a harvest. Trees are grown to be harvested, to be paper, and you don't save any trees by trying to recycle paper. But then sometimes they

get away with themselves by banning some product and then essentially leaving you with nothing to do with it, and they did that in the case of incandescent light bulbs.

And back in 2007, they banned those nice lights that we like to use and said that we had to go using those compact florescent lights instead, and this ban was not a market choice. It was a gun to your head ordering you to use compact florescent lights, because they're better for the environment. Well, once again, they were wrong about that. The compact florescent lights, every one of them has a little bit of mercury in it, and those are not to go in the landfills nor are they to be recycled. That's a lot like what's happening now with what's called e-waste, and that's what the recyclers' business is going to have to deal with from this point on. And that is the electronic waste. Pennsylvania has just passed a law that says you cannot put a PV, a computer, a printer, or any smaller electrical device in any landfill or even in a bin of any kind, or else. Or else what? So they're going to figure that out.

Right now they mainly want to say, well, it's going to have to be the manufacturer's responsibility to say what this product does from its entire life from existence to its own grave. And somebody will probably figure those things out. All of those have got a small bit of rare earth, it's called, that China has cornered the market on, has most of the rare earth. The U.S. doesn't have any that is being produced at this point, and those will be valuable. But it's pretty much thought, Tom, that recycling per se by the year 2020 can't go any further in improving what it does. And that it will be limited to perhaps recycling about 50 percent of the municipal solid waste that has been recycled in the past.

**WOODS:** If what you're telling us is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, then the argument from landfills is wrong. Likewise the argument from efficiency, the claim that it's more efficient to reuse something than to create a new one. There could be certain situations in which something like that would be true, but then you would see that in the marketplace as you say. So that's false. I understand there could be some ideological reason that somebody might just want to impose burdens on mankind, but why would all these municipal governments latch on to this when it is so preposterous? And why do you think the general public, when the evidence is easily available to them—why do you think they just, lemming-like, go out there and sort all their garbage into these bins?

**LILLEY:** This all started out in a slightly different time, and we felt we were all very much wealthier. You can be really, truly green environmental when you feel wealthy and when you are wealthy. But with the collapse of the economy, people are not so wealthy, and so there is less garbage. There's less desire to do things that cost you time and money that essentially you don't believe in any longer. So California is trying to ban plastic bags, but it just got rejected. They're not in the mood for that. New York City is trying to ban Styrofoam containers, and they might get away with it. Mayor Bloomberg seems to do all kinds of nanny state things, but they're being rejected. Now Mayor Bloomberg is also saying you have to compost, meaning there has to be yet another wheelie bin in which you put your pizza scraps and the foodstuffs that had been going into general landfill. And yet, watch what happens, not unlike this silly thing about the lights and the lamps. If they decide that you can't put food scraps or combustible stuff into landfills, well then the landfill will not produce the gas that makes the landfill an operational process. It's got to have that food and that compostable stuff in order to burp.

**WOODS:** I just can't understand, and I know I sound naïve. You would think of all people in the world, why would Tom Woods be naïve about things like this? I can't understand, when this thing is so stupid and is indefensible on any conceivable ground, why it is pushed so insistently. It would be like the government saying, "From now on everybody's got to wear an orange shirt, because that absorbs light better." Some ridiculous claim, and everybody just does it. I understand that when you're wealthy you can afford to do a lot of preposterous things, but everything you do isn't preposterous. Why this particular preposterous thing?

**LILLEY:** Well it was sold to people, Tom, as "We're going to save the planet. We're running out of trees.

We've got to recycle. We will run out of petroleum for plastic. We have to recycle." So it was sold to people as a prudent, a precautionary thing to do. It was the huge picture of environmentalism as it came flooding into us in the 1960s and the 1970s, and environmentalism was: "Humans are the cancer on the planet, and it's our responsibility as tenants now to try to save the planet." So that was sold to everybody as a way for every Tom, Dick, and Harry to have a piece of the action of being part of saving the planet. It was something that everybody could do, could be made to want to do by rewards and really just communities giving you medals for being the best recyclers and a city winning an award for saving the planet. They all bought into that. It was the one environmental thing that absolutely every individual could be persuaded to do as a culture.

**WOODS:** I guess I can understand that, and I guess we didn't really hit on the claim that we're running out of X, we're running out of Y, and so you can't just throw it into the trash can. We need to recycle it, because it's super precious. But that just comes back to the response that if it really were that valuable and that scarce, then you would not want to throw it away. Because you would be offered something for it, precisely because it's scarce and because it's valuable. If that's not happening, then you have nothing to worry about from a global point of view.

We have just a couple of minutes left. I don't know if that's going to be enough time. But I did want to ask you, you keep up with the whole global warming crowd much more assiduously than I do. So you were telling me before we went on the air here that there have been some good developments, some favorable developments on the global warming front. What did you mean by that?

**LILLEY:** Well I meant that what I'll call the age of climate alarmism is coming to an end. This whole global-warming scare has just gotten so old, and people are so tired of it. Nobody's believing it any longer. And they shouldn't, and there's real information out now by a group called NIPCC, Nongovernmental International Panels on Climate Change. They have a lot of their stuff separately but also their "climate change reconsidered" physical science information is up on [Heartland.org](http://Heartland.org). Essentially, because there's been no rise in global temperature for 15 years even with a seven percent rise in carbon dioxide emissions, and the UN climate computer models were wrong about all that would be happening and the hockey stick that Al Gore used to say, "look at this alarming rise in temperature that's going to happen." Well, he left out an entire medieval warm period, and what happened now, the fifth assessment report from the United Nations has come out in this last week. They're leaving the hockey stick out. They now know they can't get anybody to buy that the medieval warm period didn't exist. And there have been no increases in droughts or hurricanes or typhoons and the human impact on any global temperatures has been a boon for flora and fauna and has been at best only one to two degrees Celsius. So the D20 group has even decided this year they're not even going to talk about climate change anymore. It's very old.

I think that recycling and environmentalism as hot issues have now been eclipsed by the collapsing economies, the stuff that you talk about, the absence of free markets. Recycling and environmentalism both did play a role in our wealth destruction whenever they made us do things that did not make economic sense. So I think what we need to be doing right now is turning to the free markets with human ingenuity. We need to get the free markets to return to sound money. If we can free the market to stop our senseless and destructive war on carbon dioxide, our war on terror, our war on drugs, our war on poverty, we will be doing the intelligent human thing. We need to create all the energy we can create. If we're going to recycle anything, we need to be recycling our nuclear fuel rods and using all of them rather than just five percent of them.