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Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability

The technological advancements made in the past 20 years have revolutionized society but have also demolished the environment. There are many issues that have risen regarding the management of e-waste. Statistics show that approximately 3.5 billion electronics were sold worldwide in 2020 alone (Tankovska). Since devices are constantly being updated and upgraded, there is a lot of waste from old electronics that is not thrown away safely; however, people are beginning to fix these environmental problems right now to improve the future of mankind. There are several levels to environmental stewardship; government initiatives, private company initiatives, and personal strategies to reduce pollution.

After noticing devastating environmental impacts, especially regarding global warming, citizens around the world are pushing governments to improve waste management and other processes. Each level of government has its own initiatives and responsibilities set in place to protect the health and safety of the environment. According to a report done at University of British Columbia, it is difficult for provincial governments to collect e-waste because there are not many federal systems set in place to do so (Kumar 14); however, there are many initiatives and plans from provincial and municipal governments to encourage environmental stewardship. Municipal governments offer specific recycling centres for e-waste and encourage organization of waste for better management. For example, Peel region has clearly stated where to recycle on their website (Peel Region) and partnered with Electrobac to put “electronic drop boxes” throughout the cities so that citizens can dispose of their e-waste safely and conveniently (Mirza). Governments play a huge role in regulating and enforcing environmental sustainability, and there

needs to be more municipal-like initiatives shown by the federal government to promote nation-wide events, recycling, and waste management.

Consumers have begun to backlash companies for not being protective of the environment. Thus, several private companies have begun recycling products, providing sustainability reports, and have shown a caring mindset towards the environment. In Canada, Electronics Product Stewardship Canada, a brilliant non-profit organization has partnered with tech companies to improve the recycling of electronic products as seen on their website (EPSC). EPSC has united thirty leading tech companies and 10 provincial/territorial governments in Canada, including Ontario, to increase regulations and laws for tech companies. This organization has been producing “Design for Improvement” reports each year since 2011. The 2019 report shows how companies have been following the 3 R’s for sustainability; reduce, reuse, recycle (EPSC 10-22). ESPC shows that “Canada diverted 115,880 tonnes from landfill through regulated e-waste recycling programs” (ESPC 22). ESPC supports e-waste regulations by lowering carbon footprint, increasing cloud computing, reducing chemical use, reducing product weight, reusing recycled materials for new products, recycling printers and toners, improving plastics management, and much more. To improve the health of the environment, the united efforts of both the government and private companies as ESPC has demonstrated.

Ultimately, it comes down to each individual to take precautions and stay educated regarding e-waste to truly make an impact. There are several strategies a person may use to reduce their carbon footprint and e-waste. The first step to solving the problem is knowing it is there. People must be aware of the impacts that improper e-waste management has. Everyone has to realize it is their own duty to carefully dispose of old electronics. A great strategic plan to

practice environmental stewardship is under the acronym SAFE (store, aware, finalize, execute). First, individuals should store all unused or old electronics in a container specifically set for recycling/refurbishing. Next, they should be aware of where to appropriately recycle these products by doing research on their local community's waste management systems or private organizations that enforce recycling/refurbishing. A plan should be finalized – one should write down a plan for disposing of the waste at a specific date, time, and place. Finally, the plan must be executed to ensure that the waste does not just sit around at home. There are many such strategies in place that can be used. People can also get creative and make their own plans, but the most important part is taking action. Individuals must begin to take actions when it comes to any environmental issues to make a difference.

In conclusion, it is extremely difficult to revert the harm already done to the planet; however, with the help of each individual, each government, and each organization/company, mankind can successfully prevent further damage. There are several great initiatives already in motion such as the government's secure recycling programs, Electronics Product Stewardship Canada's development plans as well as regulations, and personal strategies such as awareness and waste management. It is necessary for everyone to act on this crucial issue to ensure the safety of our lives, planet, and future.

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