

Chapter 14

Toxic Waste Disposal

ABSTRACT

Recognizing the severity of the toxic waste disposal, approximately 50 countries signed a treaty in 1989 seeking to regulate and control the international shipments that contain toxic waste materials. However, the primary challenge that hinders the proper disposal of hazardous waste remains the high costs of disposal and the time-consuming nature of the disposal process. These two factors constitute the main reasons why some companies seek out clandestine means to dispose of their toxic wastes instead of adhering to the laws and regulations, thus endangering both the environment and the health of surrounding living beings. A proper disposal system is essential to guarantee the safety of living creatures, as well as the welfare of the surrounding environment. However, sometimes that is easier said than done, and even disposal techniques that abide by the relevant laws may have unforeseen and devastating consequences on the lives of the employees carrying out the disposal process. This chapter explores toxic waste disposal.

INTRODUCTION

The most critical issue of the century is by far environmental ethics and the way corporations are dealing with the constant threat to the natural resources. Environmental ethics, by definition, is the division of ethics that inspects inquiries of moral right and wrong concerning the management, defense, or endangerment of the natural resources accessible to us. Toxic waste (also known as hazardous waste) is the material that results mainly from industrial activities and that can prove to be harmful to both living creatures and the environment. More specifically put, toxic waste is waste material, usually in chemical form

that is able to cause death or damage to living beings. It frequently is the product of industry or commerce, but also originates from residential usage, agriculture, military, medical facilities, radioactive sources, and light industry, like dry cleaning establishments. The term is usually used in place of hazardous waste, or discarded material that may have a long-term risk to one's health or the environment (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). These toxic materials can be disseminated into the environment by air, water and land, rendering them extremely dangerous to living organisms including human beings.

Consequentialist ethical theories stem from utilitarianism. It regards the intrinsic “good or

bad”, “value or disvalue”, as more important than the “right or wrong”. Right or wrong is determined as whether the consequences of a certain action are good or bad. Hence the answer to the second question brought forward by utilitarianism is a direct effect of the answers to the first question. Environmental ethics requests the consideration of the effects of every decision to be made by the direct consequences it will have on the environment; the environment meaning not just the natural zone but also of all living beings in the surrounds. For example, when one intends to start a power plant and launch a new industry, he must make sure that this act will not have negative repercussions on the surrounding environment. On a smaller scale, when people in rural areas burn the trash, they are completely disregarding the health issues that come to be as an effect for their reckless action.

BACKGROUND

Pollution: A Brief Description

Assume that extinguishing natural fires or exterminating some of a heavily populated local species is necessary for the protection of a certain ecosystem. Will these actions be morally acceptable? Is it morally permissible for farmers in 3rd world countries to carry out slash and burn methods to empty new grounds for agriculture? Suppose a mining corporation executed open pit mining in some, until that time, untouched area. Does that company have a moral obligation to restore the lands into their previous condition after it's done? What value does this humanly reformed land have compared with the original natural setting? “It is often said to be morally wrong for human beings to pollute and destroy parts of the natural environment and to consume a huge proportion

of the planet's natural resources.” These are some of the questions explored by environmental ethics (Palmer & Grün, 2008).

Some observers believe that the term “environmental business” is actually an oxymoron, and that corporations by definition can never be environmentally friendly. Others argue that businesses have in fact made significant effort to develop an environmentally sound strategy. The wave of concern over the environment and the effects of its misuse has on the public has risen greatly since the very primary concern over coal-derived air pollution to more advanced corporate related environmental ethics such as nuclear wastes, species extinction, solid waste disposal, toxic pollution, deforestation and global warming. As the repercussions of these different concerns accelerated so did the search for new ways to make businesses environmentally responsible.

Environmental ethics falls under the universal ethics theory. Universal ethics states that there exist several ethical standards that seem to apply across cultures. The environment and its sound existence, is one that concerns the world as a whole. Therefore the set of standards business act on regarding the environment affects not only the country itself but also the whole region near it. The ethical standards regarding environmental ethics do apply across cultures however with a slight little relativity in its implementation. For example, while everyone views recycling as an important matter, it is taken more seriously and implemented more thoroughly in the Western world than in the Arab world. Likewise, while toxic pollution in the US takes a big part in the media coverage and in the work of NGOs, it is not a focus of the public in our region. Public awareness campaigns have not impacted the public the way it should be. Due to this particular capability of toxic waste to spread throughout its surrounding environment and pose a serious long-term risk to the health and wellbeing

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