

THIS IS NOT A DRILL

The planet is burning, oceans are rising, animals are dying and our quality of life is deteriorating every day. This relentless destruction of the planet can only be stopped if humanity as a whole takes conscious steps towards sustainability.

THE BIG PICTURE

Wandering down aisle after aisle, you scavenge through countless bland, shapeless t-shirts and beat-up jeans that are five sizes too big. But suddenly, hiding in plain sight, you find what you didn't even know you were looking for. "It's definitely not easy to find good stuff because it will mostly be stuff that doesn't fit," said Jace Purcell, an avid thrift shopper and junior at Paly. "But once you find the right stuff, it's cool because you know that it's unique and it's yours." Purcell sees thrift shopping as challenging but rewarding, comparing it to a treasure hunt. More rewarding than finding the "treasure" is the feeling that you are helping the environment, one reclaimed shirt at a time.

While many associate environmental sustainability with thrifting, planting trees and using refillable water bottles, in the grand scheme of things, there are many unsuspecting contributors to the depletion of Earth's resources.

Magic, a local non-profit organization founded in 1972 by David Schrom, is a collective community that lives an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. They implement numerous initiatives that help limit negative environmental impacts, including their drastically different approach to standard transportation. The dozens of residents that live at Magic utilize bicycles as their primary mode of transportation, significantly decreasing their carbon footprint.

However, their lifestyle choice is not just about the carbon emissions—it is also about living on Earth in a way that minimizes what is taken and maximizes energy output. "We have to consider more than consumption," Schrom said. "It's throughput, it's material, it's matter. It's how much of the Earth and how much of nature we are going to rip apart in order to create artifact." Biking leaves a smaller footprint and also minimizes the resources used in the process of creating these vehicles, a factor often neglected in the estimation of environmental impact.

Things such as refilling gas and driving to the supermarket contribute to the depletion of the ozone layer and fuel a negative cycle that hurts both our planet and human life. The thinning of the ozone layer allows ultraviolet radiation to penetrate our skin and increases the rates of skin cancer, eye cataracts and both genetic and autoimmune diseases.

Although technology does not create the same obvious effects on the planet as carbon emissions from cars, it does require similar demands from large industries and corporations that produce harmful amounts of gases and other chemical substances. Junior Hyunah Roh understands the expectations and ignorance of living in a technology-driven environment.

"Living in Silicon Valley, I think we are too caught up on all the luxury of technology and I think it is important to educate each other about the environmental issues it creates," Roh said. "I feel so lucky to live in such a healthy environment and think preserving our planet has a higher priority than owning the most advanced technology."

While in the Magic community members share just one cell phone between six people, most people in Palo Alto are constantly upgrading to the newest models and discarding their outdated devices that they only used for a few years. "I recently switched to an iPhone 11 from an iPhone 8 because I was interested in the new features it offered, but I was never aware of the environmental impacts this would have," Roh

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said. This quick turnover of goods that include resources such as metals and rubber increases the waste in landfills and the lead content can have harmful effects on our body. According to Turtle Wings, a certified electronics recycler, "E-waste represents 2% of America's trash in landfills, but it equals 70% of overall toxic waste. The extreme amount of lead in electronics alone causes damage in the central and peripheral nervous systems, the blood and the kidneys."

Knowing these wasteful tendencies, many companies have launched new programs to lessen their impact on the environment. In 2008, Samsung launched a program called Responsible Recycling, in which they salvage discarded electronic devices and recycle the materials. Through this program, Samsung has recycled over 800 million pounds of would-be waste.

While it may seem like only giant corporations can make a big impact, local communities and organizations can as well. Magic understands the incredible amounts of resources required in the meat industry and the additional struggle to find fresh, affordable produce. "The farmers' market that we helped start—over on California Avenue—has vendors who every day have leftovers that they can't take away and bring back next week because it won't last. So we go around and salvage food from them with the understanding that we are going to use a certain amount of it here at Magic and donate the rest," Schrom said. "We interrupted the waste stream, made a statement to other farmers' market goers, reduced the amount we personally produced and gave the opportunity for others who were going to eat less well, to eat better."

Regardless of the size or type of an organization, everyone has an opportunity to become more sustainable and positively impact the planet.