

## THE DEAD END

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Let's say we are driving down a one-way lane. It is an easy road to drive on, but we have a feeling that there is a dead end ahead. To avoid it there is a turn that we can take, into a new road which seems a bit tricky, but we have a feeling that it is going to get us to the right place. In such circumstances, do you think it's wise to keep going straight? Probably not. But I regret to say, that has been Japan's attitude in waste management crisis. Now, through the next several minutes, I'd like to discuss what must happen to Japan's approach towards waste management, before we get stuck in the dead end.

Well I'm sure you are all aware that Japan dumps huge quantities of waste every year. The amount that goes to landfills roughly equals to a pile 1.5 meters-high, which is about my height, inside the area of the entire Yamanote-line. Of course quite a few amount needs to be incinerated beforehand, or otherwise the landfill sites would overflow in a snap. Now this is the scenario of the one-way lane, leading straight from mass-production through mass-consumption and into mass-disposal. There is no doubt that one day we will hit the dead end, when we'll run short of energy, resources, when the world will run short of prospects for future development.

I'm sure you are also aware of many of the attempts to cope with the waste crisis, which ranges from grass-roots recycling to development of new waste treatment technology. But what might not be so familiar is that many current attempts that appear to be hopeful are actually bound to end in vain, unless we begin to figure out a different approach.

Let me raise an example. Some years ago something called Refuse Derived Fuel or RDF was invented as an alternative to ordinary waste incineration, and being backed by government efforts, RDF plants quickly spread. RDF is mainly urban waste crushed and dried into small particles and compressed into pellets to be burned as fuel. The rhetoric used here was "Thermal Recycling". My question: Is this a valid solution?

At this point I would like to emphasize that RDF, and many current recycling efforts, are not the way to resolve the waste crisis from its

roots. That is because the current recycling mechanism assumes a stable supply of waste in order to function. It is no good to invent some new technology and cover up the mess after the wastes are produced. It seems that in our society something very important has been ignored for a long time. That, I believe, is the original manufacturers' responsibility for their products, considering them as potential wastes.

So what is the proposal? I strongly support the concept called Extended Producer Responsibility and I propose for it to be established in the series of recycle laws that Japan is about to introduce. The idea is to make it an obligation for original manufacturers to take responsibility for their products throughout their course; that is, from production, until collecting and recycling. The word "extended" is there because it extends the existing concept of "product liability". This idea is now being promoted by the OECD or Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and it is now quickly gaining recognition in the international level.

What difference is the introduction of this idea going to make? First and foremost, it is going to be the manufacturers who will directly take the cost of recycling. That includes, first, to somehow collect what is now being disposed that was once their own creation, and afterwards, to treat them and make sure that the materials circulate again in the market. Until now, the money has been supplied in such ways as local governments using taxes, or individuals paying for garbage bags. It doesn't necessarily mean that manufacturers have to physically recycle things by themselves, but it means that they have to reflect the cost in the consumer price. In other words, the consumers and the manufacturers will still share the burden but now within the price mechanism.

The fundamental idea is to make the manufacturers take the initiative for recycling. The price mechanism can make a difference because it will finally put the manufacturers in a state of competition for more cost-efficient recycling. The manufacturers, who design products, who know what they are composed of, must know the way to make less waste with them starting from the original production stage. Please remember, the situation will never change, as long as the manner of manufacturing does not change. .

Why can this be a step forward? In essence it means that manufacturers are now made responsible for redesigning products so they can be recycled with less difficulty and at a lower cost. The price

mechanism can make a difference here, because manufacturers will naturally have to compete. And this is something that can only be done at the manufacturing level. I believe recycling will never go anywhere before all of us realize that manufacturers are also the producers of potential waste.

The lack of Extended Producer Responsibility has been contributing to the present day economy, where irresponsible mass-production, which seeks profits out of short span goods, has been endlessly "manufacturing" wastes. If we stick to this "one way lane", we will get stuck in the dead end. Now it is probably time that we begin to take a different approach towards economic development. Now it is probably time that we start thinking about the way where everyone in the economic flow will share the responsibility for sustainable use of resources.

Why don't we begin then? Let us be the ones to show understanding and support for the movement --to take the turn out of the dead end.