

Ling Vuong
c/o Mr. Kramer
John Page Middle School
29615 Tawas
Madison Heights, MI 48071

Dear Ling Vuong:

Thank you for your recent letter expressing your concerns over waste coming into Michigan from Canada. I appreciate your interest in this subject. It is great when students become concerned with their communities and environment. Taking action to help the environment is an important part of being a good citizen at any age. Trash disposal is a problem for both Americans and Canadians because the citizens of both countries produce a lot of waste. The two countries have to work together as good neighbors to manage our waste. Part of this relationship is to ensure safe management of all kinds of waste.

Canada does send trash to Michigan right now, and they are permitted to do so by international law. At the same time, Michigan and other states send waste for disposal out of state and sometimes to Canada. I want to assure you that the Canadian waste going to Michigan is being managed according to all U.S. regulations. The waste goes to a landfill that is licensed and inspected by your state's Department of Environmental Quality. In the past, in the United States, trash was dumped on the ground and people worried that these trash dumps were leaking pollution into the water and soil. In response to these concerns, the U.S. Congress passed the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act to regulate waste and to encourage resource conservation. In 1991, EPA wrote a new set of rules for landfills to follow. Your state also wrote rules for landfills and makes sure the landfill owners follow them. The rules make landfill owners prevent leaks into the soil and water, cover the waste every day, and operate their landfills under careful controls. These rules have made sending trash to the landfills safer.

The reduction and recycling of trash are very beneficial to the environment. I understand that the City of Toronto has invited you and your classmates to keep in touch and suggest alternatives. We will be interested in how your discussions proceed. Toronto has aggressive efforts underway to reduce and recycle its trash. Toronto requires its citizens to recycle and compost materials to reduce the amount of trash they send to disposal. Their goal is to stop sending any trash to Michigan landfills by 2010. You are probably already aware of this, but you can learn more online about Toronto's composting program at <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/compost/index.htm> and learn more about their recycling efforts in general at <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/garbage/index.htm>.

I also understand that you are interested in what EPA is doing in this area. EPA launched the Resource Conservation Challenge, a challenge to all Americans to save our resources, prevent pollution, and promote recycling and reuse. This challenge is about adopting a resource conservation ethic in all we do. One of our key messages is "What can you save today?" You can participate in this challenge and make a difference by starting programs in your community and school to conserve resources, reduce waste, reuse products, and recycle. I hope that you will become involved. You can find detailed information about the challenge on our web site at <http://www.epa.gov/rcc>. EPA's website at <http://www.epa.gov/students/waste.htm> has a lot of information developed for students on how to reduce trash through recycling and buying "green" products, as does <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/students.htm#mad>. I am enclosing a copy of our "Make A Difference" kit to help you and your class explore ways to make positive contributions to the environment.

I want to express my special appreciation for the wonderful quilt that you enclosed with your letter. It is rare that I receive such a personal expression of commitment and concern for the environment.

Thank you again for your interest and your willingness to work on this issue. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact me, or Laura Coughlan of my staff by phone at 703-308-0005 or by email at Coughlan.Laura@epa.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Marianne Lamont Horinko
Assistant Administrator

Enclosure

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