Creating a Pollution-Free Shopping Experience

By Mariah Moon

The future of online shopping is bright. At least, for me. I use sites like Amazon and Walmart often to browse, to look around, and to even order things. However, these sites also mean it takes different forms of power to get our things and, in some cases, our groceries.

The power we use for our electricity, and therefore to get our internet to shop online, comes from power plants. Often, these power plants are fueled by coal. Shale fuels some – a kind of oil that is found in sandy areas – and others are fueled by nuclear power. Others might be experimenting with solar or wind powers, but for the most part, coal still fuels our power plants.

This isn’t the only kind of fuel that shopping will be using. When one shops online, their products are often shipped via planes and cars. A plane uses jet fuel to get around, and regular jet fuel still creates pollution. It’s not as harmful to the environment as carbon pollution, but it still harms the environment.

Finally, you have the diesel fuel and gasoline fuels that will be used in the cars and trucks to deliver the package from airport to your door. Big trucks pick up the packages and deliver them to the post office or a sorting apartment. Then, the postal workers drive it to your house once it has been sorted and given a proper tag.

Compare that to the fuels that shopping in person will use. Depending on what you’re buying, the product may have travelled overseas on a freighter ship, in a truck, or a car. It would use about the same amount of fuel that buying online would.

However, there is an extra cost in shopping in person over online shopping. We all forget that shopping in-person requires that we walk through the store. Then, of course, there’s the idling in the parking lot, at the stop lights, etc. Now, while a truck or a car used to transport the products we buy online will idle at stop lights too, they’re not idling in many parking lots. They might be idling in driveways, though.

Online shopping still poses an environmental risk. Our cars, while getting better and becoming more environmentally friendly, still create carbon dioxide pollution. So, our online shopping will continue to create pollution that puts our environment at risk, and that increases our chances of coming closer to a climate that is hostile to us and our being.

Not to mention the packaging. Many of our purchases made online are wrapped in plastic! Plastic yogurt containers from the 1970s have been found on American beaches. Do we have no shame? No. We have no shame.

The worst part of this is that we have the knowledge to lessen our emissions. As older cars are phased out – and especially when the cars are going to be sold for scrap metals – we ought to replace them with new cars that don’t create as much pollution. Fully electric cars still create pollution, but using a hybrid – which can run on gasoline and electricity – might be a better way to use the money because that battery can last upwards of 100,000 miles.

Not many people will run 100,000 miles in a couple of years doing in-person shopping. Postal workers might run that many miles in a couple years on a few irregular routes, but many can go five or ten years before hitting that magic number. Since the batteries can last somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 miles (though closer to the middle of that range), getting a hybrid for our postal workers might help cut down on gasoline emissions.

Funding research to find renewable and sustainable energy is the only way we can really cut down the pollution and the carbon footprint of any kind of shopping since having a car is almost completely necessary for any kind of living in the United States. Since the United States has refused to get on board with neighborhoods and shopping centers that are within walking distance of where most live, one needs to be aware of the pollution being created.