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Robo-taxis' hold promise, and perils, for automakers

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By DANIEL ARONSSOHN, AFP

Imagine the future. The year is 2028. Sarah, a young mother, gives her two children a kiss goodbye before buckling them into the driverless car that will take them to school. Sarah doesn't have a car and has no plans to buy one. She has checked the numbers and the result is clear. It's much cheaper to order a car only when she needs one. The "robo-taxi" has also made her life easier. But, this change came only after self-driving cars changed the carmaker business model they had used for decades.

Today, the revolution is already underway. Every major car brand is racing to create autonomous, or self-driving, electric cars and trucks. It's expected that people will be able to order a vehicle with just a few clicks of a smartphone. Fully electric cars are expected to make up more than 1 in 10 new cars worldwide in 2025. That is from a report by experts at Bank of America Merrill Lynch last month. The cars are predicted to jump to 1 in 3 in 2030, the report said. By 2050, the prediction is for 9 out of 10.

Car Companies Look To The Future

The motivations are clear. Smog is becoming a serious risk in cities around the world. China, in particular, is demanding cleaner vehicles. Electric cars do not pollute the air like traditional cars do.

Carmakers also have new competitors. Apple, Google and Tesla see a chance to lead sales assisted by their work in technology.

Car companies aren't waiting. In Germany, Daimler is working with Bosch to develop self-driving electric cars. They could be on the road by the early 2020s. Daimler has already launched its car-sharing service, Car2Go, in some two dozen cities worldwide. Volkswagen, also in Germany, is exploring e-shuttles and rides services.

It's Going To Be Expensive

Robo-taxis could bring almost half of auto company profits by 2030, said German company, Roland Berger. The company expects sales of private vehicles to drop in that time.

Experts warn that the automakers that fail to adapt might not survive. Adapting can mean companies spending a great deal of money on batteries and other technology. There is little chance of a payoff anytime soon.

Volkswagen announced a plan to spend a large sum over the next five years on hybrid and electric cars and services. It is considered its bid to "reinvent" the automobile.

The contest will be costly for all automakers. There are estimates that costs to make the next generation of electric cars will be much higher than for traditional cars. Returns on spending are expected to be limited. The shift toward electric "will have to be taken on by all automotive companies," PSA's chief Carlos Tavares said. He spoke at the Frankfurt, Germany, auto show in September.

Western carmakers and government officials fear they are lagging behind Asia. China, in particular, is making headway on electric motors and batteries.

Name: _____ Date _____ Period _____

Directions: Quote evidence from the article to support the following arguments. Use quotation marks and citations.

1. Car companies should make more electric and/or self-driving cars.
2. Electric, self-driving cars should be used because they create less pollution.
3. Robo-taxis could be profitable for automakers.
4. Automakers should learn to adapt to a changing world of transportation.
5. Car companies should expect an increased cost for making electric cars.
6. Companies and governments should work together so they don't lag behind.

Should the U.S. scrap the recycling program?

By William F. Shughart II, Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff

If you're worried about the planet, please make sure your garbage is buried in a landfill. There's plenty of space available.

On the surface, the phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle" may seem like a sensible call to action. It makes particular sense to those who want to limit the amount of carbon dioxide we release into the air when we burn fossil fuels like gas and coal, and reduce the amount of waste left behind for future generations.

The reality, however, is that the cost of the recycling process almost always outweighs the benefits.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says recycling 1 ton of paper or aluminum cans can save about 3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions over producing new materials. Carbon dioxide is produced during the recycling process and can lead to climate change. A ton equals 2,000 pounds.

But not so fast.

Paper mills pay for the trees they process. If it was cost-effective to recycle scrap paper, paper companies would be beating down your door to buy it — but they aren't.

That means it's more expensive and takes more energy and water to recycle old paper than to cut down and process pine trees and then plant pine seedlings.

Plastic provides another problem. Given the recent dramatic decline in oil prices, it is now cheaper to make a new plastic container than to recycle an old one.

Glass is an even worse recyclable. To reduce emissions by 1 ton you have to recycle 3 tons of glass. If you include the cost of collecting glass in small quantities from neighborhoods, and the pollution produced by the collection trucks and the recycling process itself, glass recycling creates more emissions. It is also more expensive than making new glass, which comes primarily from sand, an abundant raw material.

By sending an extra fleet of trucks around town once a week, supporters of recycling actually are not protecting the environment.

The true recycling test is whether someone is willing to pay you to sort and save your trash. If they're not, what you've been told about recycling in the past is probably just garbage.

Directions: Quote evidence from the article to support the following arguments. Use quotation marks and citations.

1. Garbage should be bagged and sent to a landfill.
2. Companies should invest in planting more trees.
3. Recycling hurts the environment.
4. Cans and paper should be recycled.