

## Being Smart About Being Green

By Philip White

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Evidence that we each need to be more environmentally responsible surrounds us. Global warming is no longer just “a theory,” and the rate of species extinction increases precipitously as the growing human population expands its pressure on the Earth's resources.

How can the average person realize the greatest environmental benefits from his or her actions? Consider our neighbor fretting over a used teabag, assiduously separating it: paper to the paper-recycling bin, the staple to the metal recycling bin and the used tea to the compost heap. The effort compared with the environmental benefits does not qualify as smart green behavior.

Being smart about being green means addressing the major issues first and not agonizing about the endless stream of minor issues. What are the major issues? They are those components of our consumption that create the most pollution and habitat disruption. For most people they include our shelter, transportation, food and our political process.

### Shelter

Reducing energy and water demands of our buildings is green and saves money. We can purchase energy-efficient air-conditioning systems (SEER 16 +) and Energy Star certified appliances (fridges, dish and clothes washers, lighting and ceiling fans). We should demand highly insulated

(R25) walls and e-windows, retrofitting whenever we can afford.

Turning the thermostat to 84 degrees in the summer and 60 degrees in the winter (and dressing accordingly) is responsible. Planting deciduous desert trees to the east, south and west of buildings reduces cooling electricity demands. Solar hot-water systems use free energy that is most abundant in the Valley of the Sun.

Global warming is predicted to reduce snow pack in the Rocky Mountains and thus diminish the life-giving water from snow-fed rivers. Green lawns may remind us of New England, but they are categorically irresponsible. Because outdoor water use comprises two-thirds of a household's water tab, we should reduce water demands by switching to, at a minimum, winter lawns, or desert landscaping. Another key is installing water-efficient toilets and washing machines.

### Transport

We can use increasing alternatives to car transport. The deliciously air-conditioned Phoenix bus system is highly organized, and they allow loading of bikes for connecting the dots of your trip. The Valley light-rail system (operational in 2008) will add a whiff of planet-friendly urbanity to our metropolis. As cross lines are built in the future to expand the system, its usefulness will expand exponentially.

If we must purchase a car, we can find one with the highest fuel efficiency that we can afford. If we must drive, we can share the ride, with the added benefit of the carpool lane.

### Food

Greener eating is food that is locally produced and resides low on the food chain. For Valley residents, this means enjoying produce from



farmers' markets (such as <<http://www.crookedskyfarms.com>>), while eschewing food from other continents. Why consume Chilean strawberries in January or French wine when we have scrumptious local citrus and delicate Napa Valley chardonnay? We can also eat proteins that create less pollution per ounce than others. For example, poultry and farm-raised fish are less polluting than corn-fed beef and pork.

## **Leadership**

Our beleaguered political system runs largely on vested constituent dollars and votes from the rest of us. We play a vital role by demanding laws and regulations that make it possible to live more

greenly: diverting highway funds for bike routes and enlightened urban planning, diverting tax revenues for solar systems and home insulation subsidies, increasing efficiency standards and so much more.

There are many opportunities to be green; these are some of the more vital ones. Achieving these need not be difficult. We exercise intelligence by addressing the major problems first and, for our emotional health and continued motivation, not stressing about the small stuff.

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