

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by

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Americans Care About the Environment, but Not Enough

There is no question that just about everyone really cares about the environment. What I mean by "everyone" includes companies, countries, NGOs, people, etc. But the real question is whether everyone cares enough. This is a crucial question when we have so many environmental issues that need our attention. There are many examples of situations where people just don't care enough.

In a recent carbon reduction initiative at an organization of about 1500 people, the response to participate was very poor. An organization called UCapture provides a mechanism for individuals to help reduce carbon emissions at no cost and in a very passive way. All one has to do is create a simple account and if that person goes to any one of about 25,000 companies that sell products or services online, they can reduce carbon emissions. UCapture receives a small commission from that sale and applies 67% of the commission to carbon emission reduction projects. From this organization of 1500 people, only four people took the time to create an account during the first two months that this initiative was presented to them.

Another example of not caring enough is with cities that do not optimize their vehicle traffic system. After having lived in Cologne, Germany for three years, I get very frustrated with the setting of traffic signals here in U.S. At an intersection between a main road and a side street with little traffic, there is no reason for the main road traffic to get a red light when there is no traffic on the side street. The side streets should get a green light only on demand. If there was more concern with the environment and reducing carbon emissions, there would be a greater effort to synchronize traffic signals. What is frustrating is when you are on a main road and there are two intersections about 0.1 miles apart and the traffic lights are not synchronized. You get a green light at the first intersection followed by a red light at the next one. In Cologne, there was a four lane boulevard with traffic signals about every half mile, and it also had digital signals about half way between the traffic lights to tell you how fast to drive in order to get a green light at the next intersection. This reduces fuel consumption, reduces emissions, reduces congestion and reduces stress. What was even more amazing is that these traffic lights were synchronized in both directions. Here you may not even experience synchronized traffic signals on a one-lane road.

On a regular basis we read reports that our oceans are loaded with plastic. At the rate we are polluting the oceans, it won't be long before they are filled with more plastic than fish. A most recent report indicated that the world is recycling less than 10% of its waste. Knowing that plastic bottles are contaminating the earth's water, why are we still drinking so much bottled water? It makes no sense particularly when people live in cities like Chicago and New York where the tap water is of higher quality than bottled water. Today, most of the bottled water is

just tap water inserted in a plastic bottle, a bottle that requires almost twice its content of water just to produce it. So if you are drinking a 16 ounce bottle of water, you are really consuming close to 48 ounces of water.

Another problem we have here in the U.S. is food waste. About one-third of the food that is produced is wasted primarily because of stores and people buying more than is needed. Grocery stores will order more food than they would normally sell for fear of getting caught short and disappointing a customer. Individuals purchase more food for the home than they will consume because they don't want to be caught without food at home. So this food spoils and is discarded. This issue is becoming more and more serious as the world, as a whole, is consuming the equivalent of about 1.7 earths according to the Global Footprint Network.

One of the answers to our waste problem is to adopt a circular economy. Instead of the linear economy of produce, use, and dispose, we must go to produce, use, and reuse so that very little of our resources is wasted. We cannot afford to generate waste anymore.

Every year it is becoming more and more important that everyone (companies, countries, NGOs, cities, people, etc.) accept the fact that we must all do our part to protect the environment for the benefit of future generations.