

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

by  
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## **What Can You Do?**

I recently attended an environmental seminar where I was the luncheon speaker. During the question and answer period, I was asked “what is the one thing that we can do to protect the environment”. I really couldn't answer that question because I don't believe there is only ONE thing we can do. After this seminar, I gave that question more thought and came up with several things we, as common people, can do.

Let's consider local transportation which, unfortunately, is usually by automobile. The goal is to be as efficient as possible and consume the least amount of energy possible. Given that the use of an electric car is not a real option today, the next best thing is to drive as little as possible and use public transportation whenever possible. Think walking or bicycle! I drive an 18-year-old coupe with a V-8, 400 cc engine, but I only drive it on weekends and fill it up once per month. I am fortunate to work downtown Chicago and use the Metra almost every day. If you must drive a car, it should be one that is very efficient – preferably getting over 30 miles per gallon. If the U.S. fleet of cars could get an additional four miles per gallon, we would not need to import any oil from the Middle East.

Another important consideration is your home where there are many ways to protect the environment. Here is a short list of some things you can do:

- 1) In terms of energy, try to use efficient appliances with the Energy Start label. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) rather than incandescent bulbs whenever possible. I don't suggest you replace a light bulb in a closet with a CFL because it is probably not cost effective assuming you don't leave the closet light on for long periods. Some people are concerned with the small amount of mercury in a CFL, but this should not be a consideration. Burning the coal needed to provide power for one incandescent bulb will release more mercury than what is contained in a CFL.
- 2) Where possible, plug electrical devices into power strips and turn off these strips when the device is not being used. For example, you may have your computer, monitor, Internet modem, printer, speakers, etc into a power strip. Turn off that power strip as these devices still consume electricity even when they are in the “off” position. This is called vampire electricity. For example, if every TV in the U.S. was turned off, we would still need two 500 MW power plants for all of the TVs because of the remote control requirements. I don't suggest you use a power strip for your TV and turn it off as you may lose channel and time settings.
- 3) Insulate your home as best possible. Add insulation in the walls and in the attic, and replace your old leaking windows. If building a new home, the additional cost of

insulation and tight windows can be offset by a smaller furnace and air-conditioning unit. After that, you will be saving money on your lower utility bills.

4) When washing dishes clothes, make sure they are full loads. If possible, dry your clothes outdoor on a clothes line using free energy from the sun. Clothes dryers account for 7% of your energy bill.

5) Water could be a greater concern worldwide than energy. We need to conserve water as much as possible. Outside your house, use native plants as much as possible as they require less watering. In most communities, water from downspouts is discharged into the lawns rather than the sewer. This would be a great opportunity to discharge the water into a rain barrel and then use this water for your plants.

6) Since I mentioned “water” above, let me repeat something I wrote six years ago. Drink tap water rather than bottled water whenever possible. If you live in Chicago or other metropolitan areas, there is absolutely no reason for anyone to drink bottled water. Bottled water is regulated by the FDA (it is a food product) while tap water is regulated by the EPA, and the EPA standards are more stringent than the FDA standards. Also, if you drink eight glasses of water a day and it is bottled, it will probably cost you over \$1,000 per year. If you drink tap water, it will probably cost you about \$0.60 per year.

7) Also, think about the amount of space you really need for a home. Are these 5,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. homes really necessary? In years to come, it will be difficult to sell one of these because of the energy required to maintain it. Just as SUVs were difficult to sell last year when gasoline was expensive, the same will happen with these large houses. A real extreme of a large house is one built by an Indian billionaire in Mumbai which is 27 stories high and 400,000 sq. ft. He had to go up because of little available land in Mumbai. Why did he build such a large house? Because he could – not a great reason.

There is more that you can do but the above is a great start in protecting the environment for our grandchildren and future generations.