

10 Little and Big Things You Can Do

- 1. Power down!** A great deal of the resources we use and the waste we create is in the energy we consume. Look for opportunities in your life to significantly reduce energy use: drive less, fly less, turn off lights, buy local seasonal food (food takes energy to grow, package, store and transport), wear a sweater instead of turning up the heat, use a clothesline instead of a dryer, vacation closer to home, buy used or borrow things before buying new, recycle. All these things save energy and save you money. And, if you can switch to alternative energy by supporting a company that sells green energy to the grid or by installing solar panels on your home, bravo!
- 2. Waste less.** Per capita waste production in the U.S. just keeps growing. There are hundreds of opportunities each day to nurture a Zero Waste culture in your home, school, workplace, church, community. This takes developing new habits which soon become second nature. Use both sides of the paper, carry your own mugs and shopping bags, get printer cartridges refilled instead of replaced, compost food scraps, avoid bottled water and other over packaged products, upgrade computers rather than buying new ones, repair and mend rather than replace....the list is endless! The more we visibly engage in re-use over wasting, the more we cultivate a new cultural norm, or actually, reclaim an old one!
- 3. Talk to everyone about these issues.** At school, your neighbors, in line at the supermarket, on the bus...A student once asked Cesar Chavez how he organized. He said, "First, I talk to one person. Then I talk to another person." "No," said the student, "how do you organize?" Chavez answered, "First I talk to one person. Then I talk to another person." You get the point. Talking about these issues raises awareness, builds community and can inspire others to action.
- 4. Make Your Voice Heard.** Write letters to the editor and submit articles to local press. In the last two years, and especially with Al Gore winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the media has been forced to write about Climate Change. As individuals, we can influence the media to better represent other important issues as well. Letters to the editor are a great way to help newspaper readers make connections they might not make without your help. Also local papers are often willing to print book and film reviews, interviews and articles by community members. Let's get the issues we care about in the news.
- 5. DeTox your body, DeTox your home, and DeTox the Economy.** Many of today's consumer products – from children's pajamas to lipstick – contain toxic chemical additives that simply aren't necessary. Research online (for example, <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/>) before you buy to be sure you're not inadvertently introducing toxics into your home and body. Then tell your friends about toxics in consumer products. Together, ask the businesses why they're using toxic chemicals without any warning labels. And ask your elected officials why they are permitting this practice. The European Union has adopted strong policies that require toxics to be removed from many products. So, while our electronic gadgets and cosmetics have toxics in them, people in Europe can buy the same things toxics-free. Let's demand the same thing here. Getting the toxics out of production at the source is the best way to ensure they don't get into any home and body.
- 6. Unplug (the TV and internet) and Plug In (the community).** The average person in the U.S. watches T.V. over 4 hours a day. Four hours per day filled with messages about stuff we should buy. That is four hours a day that could be spent with family, friends and in our community. On-line activism is a good start, but spending time in face-to-face civic or community activities strengthens the community and many studies show that

a stronger community is a source of social and logistical support, greater security and happiness. A strong community is also critical to having a strong, active democracy.

7. Park your car and walk...and when necessary MARCH! Car-centric land use policies and life styles lead to more greenhouse gas emissions, fossil fuel extraction, conversion of agricultural and wild lands to roads and parking lots. Driving less and walking more is good for the climate, the planet, your health, and your wallet. But sometimes we don't have an option to leave the car home because of inadequate bike lanes or public transportation options. Then, we may need to march, to join with others to demand sustainable transportation options. Throughout U.S. history, peaceful non-violent marches have played a powerful role in raising awareness about issues, mobilizing people, and sending messages to decision makers.

8. Change your light bulbs...and then, change your paradigm. Changing light bulbs is quick and easy. Energy efficient light bulbs use 75% less energy and last 10 times longer than conventional ones. That's a no-brainer. But changing light bulbs is just tinkering at the margins of a fundamentally flawed system unless we also change our paradigm. A paradigm is a collection of assumptions, concepts, beliefs, and values that together make up a community's way of viewing reality. Our current paradigm dictates that more stuff is better, that infinite economic growth is desirable and possible, and that pollution is the price of progress. To really turn things around, we need to nurture a different paradigm based on the values of sustainability, justice, health, and community.

9. Recycle your trash...and, recycle your elected officials. Recycling saves energy and reduces both waste and the pressure to harvest and mine new stuff. Unfortunately, many cities still don't have adequate recycling systems in place. In that case you can usually find some recycling options in the phone book to start recycling while you're pressuring your local government to support recycling city-wide. Also, many products – for example, most electronics - are designed not to be recycled or contain toxics so recycling is hazardous. In these cases, we need to lobby government to prohibit toxics in consumer products and to enact Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws, as is happening in Europe. EPR is a policy which holds producers responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, so that electronics company who use toxics in their products, have to take them back. That is a great incentive for them to get the toxics out!

10. Buy Green, Buy Fair, Buy Local, Buy Used, and most importantly, Buy Less. Shopping is not the solution to the environmental problems we currently face because the real changes we need just aren't for sale in even the greenest shop. But, when we do shop, we should ensure our dollars support businesses that protect the environment and worker rights. Look beyond vague claims on packages like "all natural" to find hard facts. Is it organic? Is it free of super-toxic PVC plastic? When you can, buy local products from local stores, which keeps more of our hard earned money in the community. Buying used items keeps them out of the trash and avoids the upstream waste created during extraction and production. But, buying less may be the best option of all. Less pollution. Less Waste. Less time working to pay for the stuff. Sometimes, less really is more.

Adapted from 'The Story of Stuff with Anne Leonard