



Viewpoints: Lifestyle tweaks help planet, save money

7:19 p.m. Wednesday, April 20, 2011

It's simple to save cash when you know where to look and know what to do.

By Dr. Reese Halter

This Earth week, you and your family can save money and make a big difference helping our environment by changing just a few habits.

The first step is to calculate how much energy you use at home, traveling and at work. We call this calculating your carbon footprint (carbonfund.org).

Once you determine how much you and your family are spending, it is simple to begin to cut back.

Reducing is the most important habit that we all easily can change. Reduce what you use by buying quality products. Quality products cost more but last longer, save you money (from not having to buy inferior products again); and quality products reduce the waste we are putting into landfills.

Reusing also makes good sense. Every year, Americans drink more than 100 billion cups of coffee. Approximately 14.4 billion disposable paper cups are thrown away — that's enough cups, when placed end to end, to wrap around the Earth 55 times. Instead, get yourself a stainless steel mug, and you'll receive a 10-cent discount from many coffee vendors. At five cups a week that's a savings of \$26 a year.

Atlantans already pay 108 percent more than New Yorkers for water, and the rates will continue to rise. Toilets consume an average of 20.1 gallons of water per person, per day in a home with no water conserving fixtures. That's almost 30 percent of the average home's per-person, indoor water use.

Consider installing low-flow toilets and shower heads, and conserve one person's annual water use from 27,300 gallons to 12,500 gallons. You'll notice an immediate savings on your water bill. Turn off the taps when you brush your teeth and only run the dishwasher when it's full on the economy setting and save another \$72 a year.

Forty percent of all car trips in America are less than two miles. Ride a bicycle or walk that distance and get exercise instead of spending fuel. By reducing just one-third of those less than two-mile car trips, you will have saved \$215 at the end of the year.

The average home emits about twice as much CO₂ compared to the average car. An energy audit will save you as much as 30 percent on your yearly bills, and Georgia Power offers a free walk-through to help you save money.

Roughly half of our home's energy expense comes from heating and cooling. That means furnaces and air conditioning units must be serviced biannually and air filters changed at least twice a year.

By setting your winter thermostat to 68 and your summer thermostat to 78, you'll save \$225 a year. Also, put your clothes, after washing them in cold water only, out to air-dry and you'll save an additional \$225 annually.

Use a smart power strip and plug in as many electronic devices that have a stand-by mode in your home, turn off the power bar and you'll reduce your power bill by an additional 5 percent to 15 percent. That translates into another \$97 savings a year. Phantom electricity drawn from devices on stand-by mode across America wastes \$4 billion of electricity a year.

Remember to turn off lights when you leave a room, shut down computers and printers when not in use, and unplug all cellphones, laptops, cameras, mp3 players and toothbrush adapters — save

\$105 a year.

This spring, help our beleaguered honey, bumble and solitary bees by not using any insecticides, herbicides, miticides or fungicides in your yard. In addition, plant yellow and blue flowers in large blocks, so as to provide a safe source of nectar and pollen for our bees.

Lastly, plant a tree for every member of your family. Trees reduce heating and cooling costs around homes and buildings by as much as 40 percent. They also suck CO₂ from the atmosphere, filter stormwater runoff, purify the air and provide habitat for many urban critters.

Dr. Reese Halter is an Earth Doctor; Science Communicator: Voice for Ecology and conservation biologist at Cal Lu University. His upcoming book is entitled "Insatiable Bark Beetles: Harbinger of Global Warming," Rocky Mountain Books.

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