

Taking Action to Care for God's Creation

There are simple actions each of us can take to have a measurable, positive impact on the environment. Everyone knows ordinary people can make personal changes to help the environment. The Center for a New American Dream (visit www.harcourtreligion.com for a link to their Web site) asked leading scientists and experts in the field of conservation what first steps they would ask Americans to take to reduce global warming, conserve water and energy, and save wildlife and forest habitats.

From the list of suggestions, the Center chose actions that matter most and can be measured accurately, in order to demonstrate people's impact with integrity and actions that are realistically achievable for most people, in order to have broad, meaningful appeal. Together we can have an even greater positive impact on the earth.

When these basic actions are taken together by thousands of us, there is a significant impact on our environment. These actions are not the complete answer to all of our environmental problems. We will be able to hand a healthy planet over to future generations only if government, businesses, and institutions each do their part. These basic actions offer ways for each of us to personally engage and affect change in the world around us. They offer ways for us to be environmental role-models in our families and our communities. And, through concrete example, they challenge business leaders and elected officials to make the right decisions as well.

Basic Actions

Skip a car trip each week.

The average American drives over 250 miles each week. Since 1960, the American population has increased by 50%, but the miles we travel each year have more than tripled. And 90% of our trips are in an automobile or light truck. Americans consume 40% of the world's gasoline and emit more climate-changing gases than China, Japan, and India combined! Transportation, overwhelmingly in automobiles, is responsible for about one-third of American greenhouse gas emissions. The car culture is also a main driver of sprawl and the ensuing habitat loss.

We can do better. By reducing your drive time and miles on the road, you can have an immediate positive impact on the environment. Choose one trip you make on a weekly basis. Then decide how to get that task done without your car—whether it be by biking, taking public transportation, carpooling, telecommuting, or simply eliminating an expendable trip. Skipping a weekly 20 mile trip represents less than a 10% decrease in the average American's driving and can reduce one's weekly carbon dioxide emissions by more than 18 pounds. If only 1,000 of us take this action, we will prevent nearly a million pounds of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere each year! Together we will give the environment a break and improve air

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quality while preventing traffic congestion, sprawl, and habitat loss.

Action Plan

The weekly trip(s) I am skipping totals _____ miles per week. My car gets _____ miles per gallon (if you are unsure, enter the American average of 21.5 mpg).

Use the following formula to compute your impact:

_____ miles skipped per week x 1,021
÷ _____ car's mpg = _____ pounds of
carbon dioxide saved each year

Replace one beef meal each week.

Meat production is extremely resource-intensive—livestock currently consume 70% of America's grain production. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, grazing accounts for 800 million acres (40% of U.S. land), and 18% of all water consumption is devoted to producing feed for livestock.

Feedlot beef is particularly wasteful. Producing one pound of feedlot beef in California, for example, requires five pounds of grain and over 2,400 gallons of water. It also results in the erosion of five pounds of topsoil. To make matters worse, poultry, hog, and beef factory farms also lead to agricultural waste runoff—a major source of water pollution.

If you want to go vegetarian or switch to organic, free-range meat, great! But you can have a measurable impact by simply replacing one steak, plate of spaghetti and meatballs, beef lasagna, or a trip to the local fast food joint with a nice vegetarian

meal once a week. If only 1,000 of us take this action, we will save over 70,000 pounds of grain, 70,000 pounds of topsoil and 40 million gallons of water each year.

Action Plan

I am replacing _____ meal(s) of beef with vegetarian meals each week.

Use the following formula to compute your impact:

_____ beef meals skipped x 40,200 =
_____ gallons of water saved each year
_____ beef meals skipped x 70 = _____
pounds of grain saved each year

Declare your independence from junk mail.

The world's forests are feeling the strain of unsustainable demand for wood and paper. By weight, paper products also comprise nearly one-third of all waste going into American landfills. Bulk mail, a substantial chunk of our paper waste, is especially troubling because it is often unsolicited and thus leaves citizens to dispose of materials they did not choose to consume in the first place. Catalogs and other direct mailings account for 5.2 million tons of waste each year and are recycled at a paltry rate of 19%, leaving over 4 million tons to clog landfills. That's 340,000 garbage trucks filled to the brim with nothing but bulk mail!

It doesn't have to be that way. You can call or write catalog houses to cancel unwanted or duplicate catalogs or to be placed on a restricted annual mailing list.

For every 1,000 of us who succeed in halving our personal bulk mail, we will save 170 trees,

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nearly 46,000 pounds of carbon dioxide, and 70,000 gallons of water each year.

Action Plan

I am taking steps to halve my receipt of bulk mail. I am saving one-sixth of a tree, 46 pounds of carbon dioxide, and 70 gallons of water each year.

Visit www.harcourtreligion.com for links to a form that will generate letters for you to print out, sign, and mail to marketing preference organizations. You can also find resources to eliminate "pre-approved" credit card offers, catalogs, and other direct marketing.

Move the thermostat 3°F.

Heating and cooling represents the biggest chunk of our home energy consumption. Just by turning the thermostat down three degrees in the winter and up three degrees in the summer, you can save an average of 7.7 million BTUs of energy and prevent the emission of nearly 1,100 pounds of carbon dioxide annually. If only 1,000 of us shift three degrees, we will prevent over a million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

Action Plan

I am turning up my thermostat _____°F in the summer.

I am turning down my thermostat _____°F in the winter.

Use the following formula to compute your impact:

_____°F up in summer x 203 + _____°F down in winter x 157 _____ =
_____ pounds of carbon dioxide saved each year

Install an efficient showerhead and low flow faucet aerators.

Of all natural resources, water is the most essential. But available supply is diminishing rapidly as human populations swell and inefficiently drain precious aquifers. Consider replacing your washing machine with an efficient front-loading washer, replacing an old toilet with a new ultra low-flow model, fixing leaks around the home (over 25 gallons per day in the average household), and replacing your lawn with a grass species that doesn't require fertilizer or watering. In the short term, pick up faucet aerators for \$2 to \$5 a piece and a high-efficiency showerhead for under \$20. In less than a year, you'll make that money back through lower utility bills. By reducing demand for hot water, this action also reduces fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse emissions.

For every 1,000 of us who install faucet aerators and high-efficiency showerheads, we can save nearly 8 million gallons of water and prevent over 450,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

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Action Plan

Install faucet aerators. The 1.5 gallons per minute (gpm) model is more than sufficient for bathroom sinks, but you may want to go up to the 2.2 gpm model for your kitchen sink.

I am installing efficient showerheads and low flow faucet aerators throughout my house. My household is saving 7,800 gallons of water and 460 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.