

Ways to Reduce Greenhouse Gases as a Consumer

Burning fossil fuels such as natural gas, coal, oil and gasoline raises the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and carbon dioxide is a major contributor to the greenhouse effect and global warming. You can help to reduce the demand for fossil fuels, which in turn reduces global warming, by using energy more wisely.

The following is a list of steps YOU can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions:

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Buying products with minimal packaging will help to reduce waste. By recycling half of your household waste, you can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide annually.

Use Less Heat and Air Conditioning

Adding insulation to your walls and installing weather stripping or caulking around doors and windows can lower your heating costs more than 25 percent, by reducing the amount of energy you need to heat and cool your home. Turn down the heat while you're sleeping at night or away during the day, and keep temperatures moderate at all times. Install a programmable thermostat because setting it just 2 degrees lower in winter and higher in summer could save about 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.

Replace Your Light Bulbs

Wherever practical, replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. Replacing just one 60-watt incandescent light bulb with a CFL will save you \$30 over the life of the bulb. CFLs also last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, use two-thirds less energy, and give off 70 percent less heat. If every Canadian family replaced one regular light bulb with a CFL, it would eliminate 90 billion pounds of greenhouse gases, the same as taking 7.5 million cars off the road.

Drive Less and Drive Smart

Less driving means fewer emissions. Besides saving gasoline, walking and biking are great forms of exercise. Explore the York Region Transit system and check out options for carpooling to work or school.

When you do drive, make sure your car is running efficiently. For example, keeping your tires properly inflated can improve your gas mileage by more than 3 percent. Every gallon of gas you save not only helps your budget, it also keeps 20 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

Buy Energy-Efficient Products

Home appliances now come in a range of energy-efficient models, and compact fluorescent bulbs are designed to provide more natural-looking light while using far less energy than standard light bulbs.

Use Less Hot Water

Set your water heater at 120 degrees to save energy, and wrap it in an insulating blanket if it is more than 15 years old. Buy low-flow shower heads to save hot water and about 350 pounds of carbon dioxide yearly. Wash your clothes in warm or cold water to reduce your use of hot water and the energy required to produce it. That change alone can save at least 500 pounds of carbon dioxide annually in most households.

Use the "Off" Switch

Save electricity and reduce global warming by turning off lights when you leave a room, and using only as much light as you need. And remember to turn off your television, stereo and computer when you're not using them. It's also a good idea to turn off the water when you're not using it. While brushing your teeth, shampooing the dog or washing your car, turn off the water until you actually need it for rinsing.

Plant a Tree

If you have the means to plant a tree, start digging. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. A single tree will absorb approximately one ton of carbon dioxide during its lifetime.

Get a Report Card from Your Utility Company

Many utility companies provide free home energy audits to help consumers identify areas in their homes that may not be energy efficient. In addition, many utility companies offer rebate programs to help pay for the cost of energy-efficient upgrades.

Encourage Others to Conserve

Share information about recycling and energy conservation with your friends, neighbours and co-workers, and take opportunities to encourage public officials to establish programs and policies that are good for the environment.

These steps will take you a long way toward reducing your energy use and saving you money. Less energy use means less dependence on the fossil fuels that create greenhouse gases and contribute to global warming.