



Simple Steps to Save the Planet

By Jennifer Wake



Packing lunches in reusable containers and using cloth grocery bags reduce waste Photos Jennifer Wake

At this time of year, dieting is in vogue. Starting a carbon diet (taking steps to reduce your carbon footprint and to help stop global warming) is no exception.

Moraga resident and president of Sustainable Moraga, Bill Durkin, hopes an interest in this type of diet will catch on throughout Lamorinda, creating a ripple effect of sustainability throughout our communities and beyond.

In late October, Durkin and others met with David Gershon, president of Global Action Plan and author of “The Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds.” Gershon has worked to create grassroots organizations that focus on carbon reduction behavior in cities throughout the country. In late January, Sustainable Moraga and Sustainable Lafayette are planning to hold a workshop to discuss how to promote this type of program and how to get it started locally.

“We will be looking at finding ways to reduce carbon footprints within families or organizations,” Durkin said. “Hopefully it will expand out from there and we can find facilitators who can work with schools like Acalanes, Miramonte, and Campolindo.” Much of the focus lies in dealing with transportation, garbage, water, energy, eco-wise consumerism, and getting others in the community involved.

According to Gershon’s Global Action Plan Web site, households represent between 50 to 90 percent of a community’s carbon footprint. “How we live our lives is a major part of both the problem and the solution,” the site notes. “Addressing climate change at a residential level is the low-hanging fruit because we can

make these changes immediately without waiting for major policy initiatives, new technologies or alternative energy sources to scale up.”

Both Sustainable Moraga and Sustainable Lafayette have already made a huge impact on “greening” our communities through their efforts such as battery and e-waste recycling days, and energy efficient lighting workshops. And like many others who belong to these organizations, Durkin has made personal life changes, such as not using a fireplace for ambiance while entertaining and by buying locally grown food.

“Thirty percent of particulate matter in the air is caused by home fireplace use,” he said. “And 99 percent of food imported from China comes in on container ships.” Reducing the amount of packaged foods we eat, and choosing foods that are not shipped or trucked to our tables can have a great impact on reducing our carbon footprint.

Durkin unplugs all his unused appliances in his home – DVD and Cable boxes, routers and modems, and even his TV – which are plugged into a safety bar that he turns off when he leaves the room.

“PG&E has useful tools on their website (www.pge.com), specifically their Energy Analyser, Energy savings Calculators and ClimateSmart programs (under ‘Your Home’),” added Durkin. “Also, you can now have a paperless PG&E bill emailed to you.”

The Christmas before last, Joanne Tan of Lafayette set out to simply purge unused toys from her house, ending up with a huge pile in her side yard that she donated. Since then, she has spread the word about sustainability to hundreds of others within her church and in her community, while she and her family have found easy ways to reduce their individual carbon footprint.

“In 2007, we bought a new Toyota Prius, completely upgraded our HVAC system to Infinity 2-stage firing, with two temperature zones, and installed new solar panels on our roof,” Tan said. “We rerouted and relocated the furnace in the attics, and moved air return upstairs from downstairs. We also got rid of an old water heater and installed a Noritz tankless water heater (so water is heated only when you need it), installed a double-paned new entrance door and a double-paned window.”

But reducing a carbon footprint need not be so extensive. Tan also suggests doing simple things like turning off the stove burner three minutes before you are finished cooking (leaving the remaining energy to continue cooking the food), or air drying sweaters and towels to reduce the amount of energy used by a clothes dryer.

Much like other dieting tricks, small things add up when working to reduce your carbon footprint. For



Swapping regular with energy saving bulbs is a simple way to reduce your carbon footprint

Durkin, it needs to start at home. “We have to get everybody into a better way of thinking,” he said.

For information about how to start your own carbon diet, visit www.sustainablelafayette.net.

Simple Tips to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

- Use reusable containers for kids lunches and use cloth grocery bags
- Match the size of the pan with the size of the stove top heating element
- Use microwaves or toaster ovens instead of conventional ovens, when possible
- Turn your water heater down to 130 degrees (hot enough to kill bacteria and still save energy)
- Turn off the faucet while you shave or brush your teeth
- Use latex paint instead of oil-based paint
- Conduct an “energy audit” to find heat leaks in your house and do spot insulation
- Plant draught resistant plants like Rose Campion, Mexican Sage, or Perennial Sunflower
- Use unbleached coffee filters

(Source: 50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save the Earth by the EarthWorks Group (Earthworks Press, 1989) and the Holy Planet Task Force at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Lafayette)