Ideas for Your Emissions Reduction Plan

Transportation: Drive and fly less. Share rides; take the bus and train when you can. Drive slower on the highway—at what speed is your car getting the most miles per gallon? Think about making your next car a more fuel efficient model.

Heating and cooling: Insulate, caulk and weatherstrip. Turn the thermostat and water heater temperature down; put the heating and water heating on a timer cycle. Consider solar water heating—it costs up front, but pays for itself in three years. If you're burning wood, season your wood for at least a year—you'll get more heat for less money and less emissions. Replace your older woodstove with a more efficient EPA-approved model.

Other on-grid electricity use: Turn off the lights when not in use. Change to compact fluorescent lightbulbs—they use only a quarter the electricity of incandescents and last much longer. Replace old appliances with Energy Star efficient ones. Use a clothesline to dry laundry. Unplug or turn off at a power strip electronic items such as computers and TVs that don't shut down their power usage when they are "off."

Off grid alternative energy: Consider conservation efforts (see above) and improvements to your system to reduce or eliminate back-up generator use.

Some of What's Not Considered In These Calculations

Public Transportation: Pat yourself on the back when you use the bus or the train. (These emissions costs should be added in, but most of us aren't close to using these to any significant degree; for now, let's just encourage using them when we can.)

Food: This is a big ticket item both in production and transportation costs, but is hard to quantify. Grow a garden. Buy local. Buy organic—(no petroleum-based fertilizers). Buy unpackaged. Reduce or eliminate meat. Vegan is very planet friendly.

Consumer goods: The emissions cost of manufacturing, packaging, and transporting stuff (including your car, alternative energy components, clothes, electronic goodies, building supplies, etc) is another important but hard to calculate item. Consume less—reuse and recycle.

Waste: Average yearly US emissions from waste are about 2020 pounds of CO_2 per two person household. Recycling can bring this number down to a fourth to a third of that amount.

Firewood: Carbon neutral? While firewood is part of the natural cycle of plants absorbing CO_2 while they grow and releasing it as they decay or burn, we need to think about how our firewood is produced. It's a good time to maximize carbon storage—burning releases carbon immediately. When we make fuelbreaks by thinning the forest and removing understory brush and lower tree branches, we make the forest safer from fire. Firewood harvested in this process supports the forest's ability to capture and store carbon. But if we cut down larger trees for our firewood, trees that are actively capturing and storing carbon, we are interfering with the forest's ability to do this job. Would we be willing to work harder or pay more for firewood that was harvested with the interests of the planet in mind?