

# What Can I Do?

## Real Steps a Person Can Take to Save the Planet

**TURN OFF** unnecessary electronics or lights when not in use.

**CHANGE YOUR LIGHT**—If every household in the United State replaced one regular lightbulb with one of those new compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), the pollution reduction would be equivalent to removing one million cars from the road.

**RECYCLE**—It really makes a difference. Recycling anything uses less energy and less water (not to mention less RAW materials) than manufacturing anything new. Make the extra effort to rinse out your spaghetti sauce jars, soup cans, and plastic soda bottles. Composting food waste for the garden helps return valuable nutrients to the soil. Remember, the more you recycle, the less waste goes to the landfill. Look for recycle bins and use them. If you don't see one when you need it, hold onto your trash until you do.

**BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS**—In many cases, products made from recycled materials require less energy to produce as compared to those made from virgin materials. For example it takes 75% less energy to make steel items from recycled steel. Another thing to look for is the recycled content of office paper—look for a minimum of 30 percent POST CONSUMER WASTE, not just recycled. And finally purchase the goods with less packaging—this means less energy to produce the package, less waste that goes to the landfill, and fewer trips to the curb to dispose of your trash.

**GIVE IT AWAY**—Before you throw something away, think about if someone else might need it. Either donate to a charitable organization or post it on a web site designed to connect people and things, such as [Freecycle.org](http://Freecycle.org).

**WALK, BIKE, OR USE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** instead of driving.

**CARPOOL** if you do drive.

**CONSOLIDATE SHOPPING TRIPS** and bring your friends along.

**JUST SAY NO TO PLASTIC BAGS**—The plastic bags you bring home from the supermarket probably end up in a landfill. Every year, more than 500 billion plastic bags are distributed, and less than 3% of those bags are recycled. They are typically made of polyethylene and can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade in landfills that emit harmful greenhouse gases. Reducing your contribution to plastic-bag pollution is as simple as using a cloth bag (or one made of biodegradable plant-based materials) instead of wasting plastic ones. For your next trip to the grocery store, BYOB.

**USE RECHARGABLE BATTERIES**—Each year 15 billion batteries produced and sold and most of them are disposable alkaline batteries. Only a fraction of those are recycled. Buy a charger and a few sets of rechargeable batteries. Although it requires an upfront investment, it is one that should pay off in no time.

**RETHINK BOTTLED WATER**—Nearly 90% of plastic water bottles are not recycled, instead taking thousands of years to decompose. Buy a reusable container and fill it with tap water—a great choice for the environment, your wallet, and possibly your health. The EPA's standards for tap water are more stringent than the FDA's standards for bottled water.

**INVEST IN YOUR OWN COFFEE CUP**—If you start every morning with a steamy cup, a quick tabulation can show you that the waste is piling up. Invest in a reusable cup, which not only cuts down on waste, but also keeps your beverage hot for a much longer time. Most coffee shops will happily fill your own cup, and many even offer you a discount in exchange!

**GO TRAYLESS!**—Studies show that the amount of food waste is nearly cut in half when people go trayless in a cafeteria-style dining experience. Plus it can help with the whole “Freshman 15” thing.

**WASH IN COLD OR WARM**—If all the households in the U.S. switched from hot-hot cycle to warm-cold, we could save the energy comparable to 100,000 barrels of oil a day. (And only launder when you have a full load.)

**REDUCE**—Think about the fact that everything we put onto or into our bodies (cleansers, skin creams and lotions, etc.) eventually makes its way back into the environment and try to use less as a result. Don't sacrifice personal hygiene, but don't overdo it either (moderation). Use medications when needed, but only use the recommended dosage. Using more doesn't make it work faster or better and, in fact, can cause people to get very sick, not to mention that more in simply means more out.

**BUY LOCAL**—Consider the amount of pollution created to get your food from the farm to your table. Whenever possible, buy from local farmers or farmers' markets, supporting your local economy and reducing the amount of greenhouse gas created when products are flown or trucked in.

**EAT ORGANIC**—Organic foods are grown without the use of synthetic chemicals and make use of more traditional and environmentally friendly farming methods. This means less pollution of our water, air and soil, and less degradation of our soil as well.

**BUY ECO-FRIENDLY**—There are a large number of environmentally friendly alternatives now in the marketplace and the more people purchase and use them, the more affordable they get. Soaps, detergents, shampoos, conditioners, toothpastes, which are made from renewable vegetable sources and are more easily biodegraded, are all available. Many of these items are better for you as well. (Deodorant is one very good example.)

**"GIVE A HOOT, DON'T POLLUTE"**—Think about how you dispose of items and do it properly. Anything dumped into a storm drain gets released directly into the watershed. Storm drains do not go through a wastewater treatment process; they simply transport water to a local surface water source (i.e., a creek or stream, or river, or lake). Any trash not properly thrown away generally makes it into a waterway and is eventually transported into our oceans and gyres like the "North Pacific Garbage Patch." Polluting any waterway, pollutes all water ways; we are all connected.

**"SAVE THE PLANET, EAT YOUR VEGETABLES"**—It sounds silly, but it's true. Try to eat lower on the food chain. More energy and more water is invested (with no gain) in each step of the food chain. Plus, fruits and vegetables provide more of the vitamins, minerals, and fibers that our bodies need to be healthy. And the more you get from your food, the less you need from supplements (i.e., vitamins and various other pills). This ends up tying back into one of the fundamental "R's": Reducing. Eat what you need instead of popping pills.

**TALK**—The more we talk about these issues, the more we learn, educate and reinforce the need for real, perpetual changes in basic lifestyle habits. Peer pressure works. If you impress upon your fiends the importance of their actions, change will happen.

**BE THE CHANGE**—If you want other people to change, it has to start with yourself. When you make changes you set the example for others. When people see you bringing reusable bags to the grocery store, or refusing a plastic bag, or running to pick up some trash so that it doesn't end up in the "North Pacific Garbage Patch," you make them think. If enough people do this, we can create change simply through our actions and our examples. "Be the Change You Wish to See in the World." – Ghandi

## **Looking for more ways to help?!? Check out these other sites:**

Wire & Twine

<http://www.50waystohelp.com/>

99 Things You Can Do to Save the Planet

[http://www.palmbeachpost.com/accnt/content/accnt/epaper/2007/04/22/a1d\\_earthday\\_lists\\_0422.html](http://www.palmbeachpost.com/accnt/content/accnt/epaper/2007/04/22/a1d_earthday_lists_0422.html)

50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth

[http://everything2.com/index.pl?node\\_id=1167112](http://everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1167112)

From Clean Air Cool Planet

<http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/action/solutions.php>

From Time Magazine

<http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/environment/>