

An “Everyday Gal” Doing What She Can

When I watched An Inconvenient Truth in August 2006, I was alarmed by the real threat of Climate Change from Global Warming. Prior to that time, I had lulled myself into believing that I was doing my part to have a small footprint on this Earth. Since then, I educated myself about what’s happening around the world and to the planet, and have changed my beliefs and behavior. I calculated my CO₂ footprint and my ecological footprint. I am committed to making better choices every day to lower my greenhouse gas emissions and to live a sustainable life. Here’s how...

1. Researching global warming and environmental impact science and solutions by surfing the web for the most up to date information, and also by:
 2. Watching TV and cable programs on these topics
 3. Renting movies and films about them
 4. Reading books and magazines articles
 5. Attending workshops and seminars
 6. Hosting a discussion group at my home
7. Sharing information with my network of business associates, friends and family – including sending to them “things to do” lists and other ideas.
8. Eating a lot less meat, though I’ve not yet fully committed to a vegetarian diet.

Transportation changes...with my car to reduce gas use or improve efficiency

9. Combining car trips, especially reducing single-purpose errands.
 10. Placed a small cooler in my trunk to allow me stop at the store en route.
 11. Walking to the next destination that’s only a few blocks away vs. driving there.
12. Carpooling with neighbors and friends whenever possible.
13. Maintaining a steady speed while driving, including not accelerating to go faster while driving uphill.
14. Coasting when going down hill or when coming to a stop to optimize gas usage.
15. Driving 55-60 on the highway, not 65 or higher – that saves a bunch of fuel!
16. Regularly tuning my car’s engine. I keep a logbook, and post a reminder sticker.
17. Checking and keeping my tires fully pressurized about every 500 miles – use the guide on the inside of the door panel, not what’s on the tires.
18. Turning off the motor when I suspect I will idle for more than 10 seconds, that’s the breakeven point between gas used for idling vs. for restarting the engine.
19. Limiting my “warming up” the engine to no longer than 30 seconds – this fully lubricates the engine parts.
20. Using my car heater/AC only when really needed, and running it at low settings.
21. Minimizing drag by opting for the air vent versus opening car windows, especially when driving over 35 mph. And also...
 22. Removing excess weight from inside the car like winter chains, window scrappers, and a blanket I don’t need after spring arrives; old paperwork stashed in the glove compartment; sports equipment; and sample tiles from when I remodeled the house three years ago!
 23. And from the car’s outside, too, like taking off the bike rack (or a rooftop clamshell) until I actually need it.

24. Improving gasoline efficiency right at the gas station by pumping gas into the car in the morning when ground storage tanks are still cold. Plus...
 25. Pumping gas using the handle's "slow" mode to reduce vapor creation.
 26. No topping off – that last itty bit of gas is likely being drawn back to the station's storage tank, not mine, through the vapor line.
 27. Refueling when ½ full to minimize vaporization into the tank's unfilled space.
 28. Waiting to fill up, or going to another station, if a gasoline delivery truck is at the station because particulate matter has been stirred up in the storage tank.
 29. Not driving miles out of my way to buy gas priced a few cents cheaper --- it's not worth the extra "cost" of emissions nor of my time getting there and back.
30. Learning about hybrids and high-efficiency vehicles for my next auto purchase.

Transportation and other choices when I travel out of town:

31. First asking, "Do I really need to make this trip?" [Teleconferencing, anyone?]
32. Taking the train if possible instead of driving or flying to the destination.
33. Buying carbon offsets for airplane flights.
34. Bringing my durable water bottle through airport security so I can use it on the trip. But if I forget it (and I do sometimes!), then:
 35. Keeping the plastic cup from the flight and reusing it during the flight(s).
36. Asking for the most fuel-efficient vehicle available when I need to rent a car, and avoiding car rental altogether by:
 37. Using a multi-rider airport shuttle instead of single-person car or taxi.
 38. Walking or taking public transportation when at my final destination.
 39. Renting a bike instead of a car for sightseeing.
40. Asking the hotel staff about their recycling procedures and following them. But, if the hotel has none, then...
 41. Asking them why not, and suggesting to the manager who to contact to get started on being more environmentally conscientious.
 42. Stashing recyclables in my suitcase to bring them home for recycling.
43. Not changing sheets and linens for short stays – this reduces water and energy.

Changes for more efficient use of electricity... all over the house:

44. Installing compact florescent light bulbs (CFLs) throughout the house, except for the incandescent bulbs still in use with dimmers and timers.
45. Reducing the wattage of several bulbs when switching to the CFLs.
46. Turning off lights when I leave rooms – even if for just a few minutes.
47. Lowering the programmable thermostat heat to 60° at night and 70° in the day when I am home. I also set the AC temp up to 88°, and am instead...
 48. Using the more fuel-efficient system fan and ceiling fan on hot days.
49. Closing or opening window shades to optimize the sun's natural warming affect.
50. Being more mindful about closing windows and doors before the summer heat warms the house; and keeping doors and windows closed when it's chilly outside.
 51. If I get too warm in the winter, I take off my sweater or turn down the heat instead of opening a window and leaving the heater on!
52. Changing my heating/AC system filters at least every quarter. I purchase a year's supply of air filters at the same time and pre-marked the dates for changing them.

53. Conducting a “home energy review” to inspect my home’s systems, learn how I could improve energy efficiency, and then make the repairs such as:
 54. Sealing air leaks in the furnace, room vents, and air ducts.
 55. Resetting crawlspace insulation to snug up to the floor joists and air ducts.
 56. Placing an insulating plug into the fireplace that practically eliminates drafts.
57. Reducing drafts from around doors and stairways (my windows are double-pane already) by applying a foam strip to door jams, and...
 58. Affixing door sweeps under the doors leading downstairs and to the garage.
 59. Sealing gaps in the staircase framing from underneath the house.
60. Turning off and/or unplugging electronic devices that draw electricity even when not in use.
61. Plugging the cell phone adapter, modem, laptop, printer, receiver, VCR, and DVD into power strips, and turning off those with one flip of a switch at night.
62. Unplugging my TV before I travel. [Unfortunately, my TV loses some of it’s programming when unplugged, so I don’t unplug it nightly.]
63. Subscribing to “green power” from my electricity and natural gas companies.

Changes in the kitchen, bath, and laundry for energy and water conservation:

64. Purchased Energy Star rated appliances.
65. Choosing biodegradable (non-petroleum-based) soaps and shampoos.
66. Running my dishwasher and doing laundry mostly during electrical off-peak hours. [This helps reduce the need to build more power plants.]
67. Boiling only the amount of water needed, e.g., a single cup vs. a whole kettleful, to reduce electricity use.
68. Using hot water only when absolutely needed, e.g., washing clothes mostly in cold water, sometimes in warm water, rarely in hot water.
69. Turning the hot water heater off when I’m away from home longer than 2 days.
70. Setting the hot water heater to “warm” (about 120°) – not “hot.”
71. Hand-washing dishes in a sink of soapy water instead of holding dishes under a running water stream that immediately goes down the drain.
72. Keeping showers to 5 minutes or less – I placed a timer in my bathroom.
 73. Turning off the shower water while I’m scrubbing my hair clean.
74. Practicing “minimal flushing” of the toilets, and reducing water even further by:
 75. Placing filled water bottles into the toilet’s water reservoir tank.
 76. Fixing all leaks! A constantly leaking toilet can waste 90,000 gallons a month.
77. Turning off the cold water while brushing my teeth.
78. Filling the sink when shaving my legs instead of keeping the water on.
79. Installing low-flow showerheads and sink taps. [In the later case, you can also restrict the flow of water to the tap at the valve below the sink.]
80. Capturing the cold water from the tap when getting to the hot water, instead of letting it go down the drain, and then using that cold water for indoor plants.
81. Cooling any leftover ‘cooking’ water, and using it to water outdoor plants.
82. Cleaning fruits and veggies by soaking them in a bowlful of water instead of under a running tap, and then saving that water for plant watering, too.
83. Running only full loads of dishes in the dishwasher. And research shows...
 84. No pre-rinsing of dishes is needed; just scrap off excess food for composting.

85. Washing only full loads of laundry.
86. Doing several loads of hand-wash, going from light to dark clothes, before draining the soapy water and refilling the sink for rinsing. And don't forget to also...
 87. Save some soapy water to spray on plants instead of toxins to control pests.
88. Allowing my yard to dry out in summer – it turns green again in the fall! And also...
 89. Watering in the cool of morning or late at night to reduce loss by evaporation.
 90. Keeping grass clipping on the yard to retain moisture and protect the roots.
91. Sweeping my sidewalk and driveway free of debris with a broom, instead of a water hose gushing water at 10 gallons per minute.
92. Washing my car using a bucket of water and a rag, not letting water constantly run out the hose. Better yet, going to a commercial car wash that recycles its water.

Waste reduction... I reduced my trash to one 13-gallon bag a month. Here's how:

93. Buying less. Period! I ask myself, "Do I REALLY need this _____?"
94. Sharing resources with neighbors, e.g. using their ladder instead of buying one.
95. Starting a compost pile outside for yard waste and things like facial tissue, dryer lint and hair ... it's all compostable. [This reduces landfill, reduces truck emissions, and makes moisture-retaining mulch while adding nutrients to the soil.]
96. I have great fun composting my veggie waste in my homemade worm bin, and...
 97. Helping several friends make their worm bins, too.
98. Learning everything I can about my curbside recycling program. I was amazed at how much I had misunderstood or hadn't known in the first place.
99. Using the local Master Recycler Plastic Roundup program to its fullest.
 100. Also collecting plastics from my neighbors the morning of the Roundup. ☺
 101. Sharing my Plastic Roundup story with others via a free presentation.
102. Using the Hazardous Waste Roundup for used batteries, fluorescent lights, etc.
103. Placing recycling baskets alongside the wastebaskets throughout the house in the kitchen, laundry, bathrooms, and the home office.
 104. Placing two containers in my fridge labeled "Worm Bin" and "Compost".
 105. Stashing non-compostable food waste in a container in my freezer until trash day.
106. Putting a container in my car to collect recyclables there, too!
107. Created a recycling "sorting center" in my garage by reusing and labeling old containers to store items in between roundups and for curbside pickups.
108. Choosing products that have minimal packaging such as scooping goods from "bulk bins" whenever possible at the grocery store. Plus...
 109. Labeling and reusing containers for bulk bin purchases and the help-yourself-counters like the olive bar and nut butter maker.
 110. Reusing a coffee bean bag over and over until it's ready to compost.
 111. Buying meats from the counter – this practically eliminated Styrofoam trash.
 112. Selecting the most recyclable packaging in this order: glass, paper, metal.
113. Choosing products that are recyclable or reusable, e.g., cloth carrying bags (stashed in my car) for groceries, and at all stores. Some others:
 114. Rotating the use of two large durable water bottles that I clean and refill with filtered tap water. I stopped buying plastic bottles of drinking water.
 115. Reducing the use of "plastic wrap" by storing leftovers in durable containers.

116. Cleaning and reusing aluminum foil over and over and over again.
117. Using a cloth coffee filter or my durable metal filter.
118. Using cloth napkins instead of paper ones.
119. Using washable sponges and rags instead of paper towels.
120. Turning old pantyhose and netted food bags into strips for tying up plants.
121. Investing in “refillable” pens instead of “disposable” ones.
122. Finding organizations that will use my “waste,” such as, returning metal hangers to the dry cleaners for them to reuse, or...
 123. Sending old corks (real cork only!) to a company that uses them.
 124. Finding a local depository for used block Styrofoam.
 125. Giving cleaned “packaging peanuts” to a local shipping company.
 126. Bringing remodeling leftovers to “The Rebuilding Center” in Portland.
 127. Sending my old cell phones to the “Call to Protect” program.
128. Making automatic bill payments
129. Opting for paperless statements where practical.
130. Reducing junk mail coming into the house by calling or emailing junk mailers to remove my address from their list. Other approaches I use are:
 131. If the mail was sent first class, striking through my address and writing “Return to sender” and “Remove my address from your list.”
[The sender pays the return postage...that gets their attention!]
 132. If the junk mail contains a stamped return envelop, sending the envelop back with a request to remove my address from the mailing list.
 133. Called 1-888-5OPT-OUT to reduce solicitations by credit card companies.
 134. Contacted Direct Marketing Association to request removal from mailing lists: www.dmachoice.org/consumerassistance.html
135. Using the blank back page of junk mail by cutting it into thirds for scratch pads.

Other home office changes:

136. Purchasing recycled paper for my home office use.
137. Using both sides of copy/print paper when printing drafts.
138. Printing on both sides of formal documents for clients.
139. Setting my printer to “fast draft” and “gray scale” to reduce ink usage.
140. Recycling spent ink cartridges.
141. Optimizing the scheduling face-to-face appointments to reduce traveling, and
 142. Setting meeting times for off-peak traffic to reduce idling in road jams.
 143. Finding mutually convenient locations to minimize miles driven.

When I “eat out”:

144. Bringing my own durable coffee mug to coffee shops – the barista smiles with approval – as well as to business meetings, workshops and conferences.
145. Going to restaurants that are making a difference, e.g., use sustainably-raised and locally produced food, buy renewable power, and recycle and compost their waste.
146. Asking for water only if I plan to drink it, and not letting the server refill the glass unless I’m still thirsty.
147. Taking only the number of sauce packets that I intend to use, and returning the ones I don’t open to the counter instead of tossing them into the trash.

148. Taking only one napkin, not absent-mindedly grabbing several which would likely be tossed out without even using them!
149. Asking servers who give me more napkins than I need to take the extra ones back.
150. Asking for ½-sized orders to help reduce waste (and the waist!).
151. Having my own reusable “take home box” with me when I dine out instead of using the restaurant’s Styrofoam or plastic version.
 152. When I forget it, I ask the server for the best reusable and/or recyclable option that most restaurants have on hand, such as aluminum foil.

I “buy local” whenever possible:

Purchasing local goods typically means less transportation emissions while supporting the local economy.

153. Using the “locally grown” signs at the grocery store to scrutinize labels, and choosing the more local option.
154. Buying a share in a local community supported agriculture (CSA) farm for fresh foods in the summer.
155. Patronizing local restaurants and other businesses whenever possible, including the local farmers’ markets and art & craft shows.

I’m involved with others on the same path, or I encourage others to hop on:

156. Contacted my City government’s sustainability planner to learn about ways that I could contribute to the City’s sustainability efforts as a citizen.
 157. Volunteering to be a member of the Sustainability Advisory Board.
 158. Coordinating a community “Styrofoam roundup” after the holidays.
159. Sent to my home owner’s association a list of water conservation ideas that they then distributed to everyone.
160. Sending emails to companies whose packaging is either excessive or not recyclable, asking them to rethink that decision and their responsibilities.
161. Signing and sending petitions and letters to local, state, and federal policy makers.
162. Belonging to a group of like-minded people who meet to learn about sustainability, and who work on community projects to encourage sustainable living.
163. Hosted an awareness-building events at my home, supported one at a friend’s condo complex, coordinated one with my City, and volunteered at one with my utility company. And...
164. I’m always looking for more opportunities to spread the word about what everyone and anyone can do to make a difference.

I know that I have not yet done everything that I can. For instance, I am still learning about using grey water and rain barrel systems, permaculture gardening, meatless meals, and eliminating toxic chemicals. However, I am on the quest to discover all the options for living a more sustainable life every day. I wish you well on your journey.

Jean Baumann

Take Action Now to Stop Climate Change ~ Every Choice Counts

I deliver Al Gore’s slideshow, as seen in An Inconvenient Truth, and I facilitate action planning sessions that help individuals and organizations respond to Climate Change.