

Environmental Action Guide

Action for a Sustainable Future

Ann S. Causey

Action Guide printed
on recycled paper

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GUIDE

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The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, Inc.

Redwood City, California • Fort Collins, Colorado • Menlo Park, California
Reading, Massachusetts • New York • Don Mills, Ontario • Wokingham, U.K.
Amsterdam • Bonn • Sydney • Singapore • Tokyo • Madrid • San Juan

Associate Editor: Laura Bonazzoli
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Cover Design: Victoria Ann Philp
Illustrations: Greg Sanders

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ISBN 0-8053-1034-7

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MJ 9594939291

The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, Inc.
390 Bridge Parkway, Suite 102
Redwood City, California 94065

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Introduction

What Can Individuals Do?

The comment I hear most frequently from my Environmental Science students nowadays goes something like this: "It seems so hopeless. After all, we live in a throwaway society, and as individuals we can't change that. Even though we are environmentally aware and concerned, there's really nothing we can *do* about these problems, is there?"



✿ Fortunately, the answer is easy: Yes, there is something you can do, and you *can* make a real difference. You can be an environmentally responsible citizen, making wise choices as a consumer and actively working to re-shape our society into a sustainable one. We have left behind the "ecology decade" of the 70's, when much of the legislative framework for environmental protection was put in place and action was left to the federal government. Gone are the 80's, a decade marked by the prevailing attitude that pursuit of personal material well-being met an individual's societal responsibilities. The 90's have been dubbed "the environmental decade." Business as usual, we clearly see, cannot solve the environmental problems it has helped create. A change is necessary, and the time is *now*. Decisions made in this decade will determine the quality of life for generations to come, and each of us plays a role in the decision-making process.

✿ Your role begins with your lifestyle. This guide focuses on ways in which you can minimize your impact on the environment by adopting an environmentally "light" lifestyle. Most of the suggestions are easy to carry out and entail little or no extra effort or costs on your part. Some,

such as organizing a student action group or regularly writing your legislators, require significant inputs of time or effort. None, however, will require major sacrifices or cause undue hardship. These are mostly things that anyone, no matter how busy (or lazy!), can do. And if most of us do them, many of our worst pollution and resource problems will be lessened.

✿ No one is expected to be a martyr when it comes to the environment, but for nearly everyone, there's plenty of room for improvement. You shouldn't feel responsible for every environmental problem, and you needn't worry if you're not ready to make major changes in your life; old habits die hard. However, many of the suggested actions in this guide can easily be incorporated into your existing routine. Simple awareness will enable you to make

many changes that are easy and convenient, and, as those become routine, more difficult changes can follow.

🌱 To help you get started, this guide is organized from “least demanding” to “most involved” actions one can take to protect the environment. Chapter One helps you to be an environmentally responsible consumer. Businesses only sell those things the public will buy; so, by making environmentally sound purchases, you’re increasing the demand for these goods and decreasing the market for products which pollute unnecessarily or deplete resources. Your buying power, properly wielded, can be a significant force for change.

🌱 The next section, Chapter Two shows you ways in which you can reduce your resource use and lessen the amount and toxicity of pollution you generate. Suggestions here focus on the home, the workplace or school, and on transportation. Chapter Three provides information on jobs in environment-related fields. Chapter Four discusses the availability of profitable, environmentally and socially responsible investments.

🌱 The next set of chapters tells you how to get more actively involved and where to look for more detailed information on any of these topics. Chapter Five is a letter-writing guide for you to use in addressing your representatives about environmental issues. Chapter Six provides advice on how to organize a student environmental action group or get others interested in environmental protection. To help you become a more effective activist, Chapter Seven presents critical thinking and logical analysis of arguments on *both* sides of environmental issue debates so that you can more objectively evaluate the many conflicting positions and emotional appeals to

which you will be subjected in the years to come.

Finally, Chapter Eight lists environmental publications, directories, and organizations which can help keep you informed and involved.

🌱 Recent polls indicate that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that we must implement stricter legislative controls and make economic sacrifices in order to preserve and protect the environment. But new laws and higher taxes alone won’t solve the problems. As a society, we must stop paying lip service to environmental quality and begin, as individuals, to take responsibility for our personal environmental impact. While it’s true that no one person’s recycling activities or buying decisions will solve our environmental problems, this does not diminish one’s responsibility to do what one can reasonably do. We do not live *in* an unsustainable society; rather, we *are* an unsustainable society, and each of us is, to some degree, responsible for that. The values we need to adopt to become a sustainable society can’t be legislated or handed down from above; rather, they begin with us, the individuals, the consumers, the citizens. Edmund Burke knew this when he said: “Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.”

-Ann S. Causey

Chapter One

Buying Right: Green Tips for Shopping Trips

Modification of your buying habits is one of the easiest steps to take towards reducing your environmental impact. Madison Avenue has begun to seize upon public environmental concern. More and more products are being advertised as “environmentally safe,” and green-oriented consumers have a much wider range of products to choose from today than they did just a few years ago. Nevertheless, you should resist the temptation to go on a green buying spree; the *best* way to minimize your contribution to resource depletion and waste production is still to consume less. So, buy only what you really need, reuse what you can, and keep the following pointers in mind when you shop.



REDUCE WASTE PRODUCTION

To start with, look at how you can attack our waste disposal problems at their source by minimizing the *amount* of materials you bring home from the store which will ultimately wind up in your trash.

- ✿ Avoid needless or excess packaging. Buy products in reusable (versus recyclable or throwaway) containers. Some beverages such as soft drinks, beer, milk, and mineral water can often be found in returnable/reusable bottles. Some groceries offer refillable containers of cooking oils, honey, peanut butter, etc.

- ✿ Where reusables are not available, buy products in containers recyclable in your area, and recycle those materials. Almost all communities have recyclers for aluminum (cans, foil, trays, etc.), paperboard (cereal, detergent, and cake mix boxes, and egg cartons), steel (fruit, vegetable, juice, soup, and pet food cans) and glass containers. Many will also accept plastic beverage, milk, detergent, and bleach bottles (though plastic packaging, as a general rule, should be avoided if there is a practical alternative). Many recyclable packages are labeled and marked with a recycling symbol.

- ✿ Avoid products which use multi-material packaging, as these are not recyclable. These include fruit juice and wine boxes, paperboard detergent boxes with plastic pour spouts, and squeezable plastic bottles of jelly, ketchup, mustard, etc.

✿ Buy non-perishables such as flour, pasta, rice, and beans in bulk.

✿ Buy the least packaged form of the item you need. For instance, buy large containers of frozen orange juice concentrate instead of glass or plastic jugs of juice.

✿ Don't buy over-packaged items. These include single-serving containers of food, many convenience foods such as the new microwavable sandwich/soup combos, and some health/beauty products such as individually plastic-wrapped sanitary napkins and tampons with individual plastic applicators.

✿ Choose durable goods over items designed to be used once and thrown away. Examples of disposables to avoid include plastic tableware, nonrefillable pens, razors, and flashlights, foil bakeware, paper napkins/towels, cleaning items such as one-use polishing and dusting cloths, pre-loaded disposable cameras, and non-rechargeable batteries; durable alternatives are available for these and most other disposable "convenience" items.

✿ Eat at restaurants which use durable rather than disposable dishes, glasses, and utensils.

✿ Reuse plastic cottage cheese and yogurt containers for storing leftovers, instead of buying plastic containers for that purpose.

✿ Use minimum packaging to transport what you buy. Take a net or canvas bag with you to carry home your purchases (available at many health food stores or by mail order from companies such as Seventh Generation; see the Buying Guide at the end of this section). Don't accept a bag for a single or

several small items. If you use store-furnished bags, request paper bags and reuse them several times, then recycle them. If you must accept plastic bags, take them with you to reuse next time you shop. The stores won't mind; it saves them money!

✿ Bring your own container for restaurant take-outs; ask that your take-home leftovers be wrapped in wax paper.

REDUCE RESOURCE CONSUMPTION

Thoughtful buying can help you reduce the amount of resources you consume. Though all resources should be conserved to the maximum practical extent, it's especially important to minimize your reliance on products which are made from or which use non-renewable resources such as petroleum and minerals.

✿ Buy stationery, copy paper, and greeting cards made of recycled paper. Look for the recycling symbol and the word "recycled" on cereal and laundry powder boxes. Most recycled paperboard can be identified even if it is not marked; it will have a gray or tan back (not white). For sources of high-quality recycled paper products, see the Buying Guide at the end of this section.

✿ Wherever possible, avoid non-durable plastic goods; plastics are petroleum-based.

✿ Make energy-efficiency a primary consideration when choosing a house or apartment, automobile, appliances, even light bulbs. Look for a well-designed, well-insulated house or apartment which incorporates passive heating and cooling techniques or which you can retrofit for efficiency. When

buying a car, buy the smallest one you can use, and choose a light-colored model with tinted glass; aim for a 40 mpg or higher EPA rating, and skip power-assisted options such as electric seats, windows, automatic transmission, etc. Compare the energy guide labels on home appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners and heating systems and buy the most efficient model which meets your needs. For lighting, consider switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs. Although considerably more expensive to purchase than incandescent bulbs, they are much more efficient and last many times longer, thus actually saving you money over their lifetime.

- ☛ Buy solar-powered versions of products such as water heaters, watches, calculators, etc.

- ☛ Buy gas (versus electric) appliances such as stoves, conventional water heaters, and central heating systems. If solar is not an option for a water heater, consider buying an on-demand heater instead of a conventional one. These units, popular in Japan, instantly heat only the water you need for immediate use. Ask your plumbing dealer for a supplier in your area.

- ☛ Buy hand-operated versions of electric/motorized kitchen appliances such as graters, grinders, mixers, ice-cream freezers, and so forth.

- ☛ Avoid products made from teak and most other tropical hardwoods unless you know they came from sustainable tree farms. Many of these hardwoods are harvested in unsustainable amounts and by destructive methods. To find out more about this, see For More Information at the end of this section.

- ☛ Don't buy anything which may have come from an endangered species, even if you are assured that such items were "legally" harvested. This includes all ivory products, both old and new, coral products, tortoise-shell combs, preserved exotic butterflies and all exotic pets such as parrots and fish. Buy only those birds or plants which you can verify were raised or propagated domestically.

- ☛ Buy less meat. Raising livestock is a grossly inefficient use of land, water, and energy resources.

REDUCE POLLUTION

The following tips will help you to avoid products whose manufacture, use, and/or disposal generates toxins or environmentally damaging substances. Often, the products themselves seem innocuous, but there are hidden environmental costs associated with them. Good substitutes are almost always available and are usually just as satisfactory.

- ☛ Buy less-toxic or nontoxic versions of household cleaning and maintenance products. Look for phosphate-free laundry detergent, dishwashing detergent, and shampoo. Avoid chlorinated products such as some scouring powders and chlorine bleach. Use nontoxic substitutes for commercial furniture polish, cleaners, and air fresheners (see Buying Guide and For More Information at the end of this section). Don't use toilet-bowl fresheners or dyes.

- ☛ For refinishing and painting projects, use the new low-toxicity paint strippers. Buy latex instead of oil-based paints.

☛ For house plants, lawns, and gardens, substitute safer alternatives for pesticides and artificial fertilizers. Use less-toxic products such as insecticidal soap (for aphids, etc.), diatomaceous earth (for slugs and other soft-bodied pests), and biological controls such as predacious insects and BT, a bacterial agent effective for controlling many garden pests. Use natural fertilizers such as manure.

☛ Try not to buy non-durable goods made of plastic, such as drink cups and bottles, plastic bags, and plastic packaging. The manufacturing process emits a variety of pollutants and generates hazardous wastes; non-biodegradable plastics, when disposed of, pose a threat to wildlife, especially marine animals; and plastics take up a disproportionate amount of space in our landfills. Incinerating them generates a variety of highly toxic pollutants, and plastic litter items remain an eyesore indefinitely. Many plastic items are easily avoided. For instance, buy soda and beer in cardboard packs instead of plastic six-pack yokes. (See the Buying Guide at the end of this section for sources for more alternatives, e.g. cellophane bags, cloth diaper covers, etc.).

☛ Don't buy the new "biodegradable" plastics. They do not biodegrade under most landfill conditions, their manufacture still consumes petroleum and produces toxic pollutants, and they cannot be recycled as some other plastics can be.

☛ Don't buy products which contain CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons). These chemicals migrate to the stratosphere and destroy ozone, our ultraviolet-protection shield. These products include aerosol dust removers, canned party streamers and confetti, noise horns, and some cleaning sprays for electronic

equipment. When in doubt, check the label. See For More Information at the end of this section.

☛ Steer clear of most products made of polystyrene foam (styrofoam). Many are still manufactured with blowing agents (CFC's) which damage the ozone layer. The new "ozone-safe" blowing agents are often powerful greenhouse gases, and plastic foam, regardless of the blowing agent, is a plastic, thus environmentally costly. Patronize restaurants which don't serve food on foam trays or in foam clamshells; order from mail-order firms which do not use foam packing materials. Carry a durable coffee cup and refill it at convenience stores or at work instead of buying coffee in styrofoam cups.

☛ Don't buy halon fire extinguishers or other halon-releasing products. These also destroy ozone.

☛ Buy spray products in pump bottles instead of aerosols.

☛ Buy washable clothing. Dry cleaning uses carbon tetrachloride (an ozone-eater) and releases volatile hydrocarbons (smog-formers).

☛ Buy carpets, flooring, and upholstery of natural (versus synthetic) materials.

☛ When cooking outdoors, use regular instead of self-lighting charcoal. The self-lighting kind emits more hydrocarbons when burned.

☛ Try to buy mostly domestically or locally grown, produce in-season. Avoid perfect-looking waxed produce; much pesticide use is for cosmetic purposes only, so accept produce with superficial blemishes.

☛ Irradiated foods may be preservative-free, but the irradiation process generates radioactive waste. Look for the symbol of irradiated food and avoid these products.

☛ Buy paper products that are unbleached or bleached without chlorine, such as paper towels, coffee filters, note pads, etc. Most chlorine-based bleaching systems emit toxic wastes, including dioxins, into waterways.

☛ Don't use marine anti-fouling paints with organotins, as these have proved damaging to marine ecosystems.

GREEN GIFTS

Consider giving gifts that express your feelings not only for the recipient, but also for the environment. Give items made from renewable or recyclable resources, that help promote resource conservation, or that help raise individual awareness. Some ideas:

☛ Boxes of recycled stationery, cards, or wrapping paper.

☛ Wooden blocks, animals, and other toys (instead of plastic) for small children.

☛ Birdfeeders (non-redwood), compost or recycling bins, or gift certificates for trees or shrubs from a local nursery.

☛ An assortment of low-impact household cleaners, detergents, food-storage bags, etc. *Eco-Choice* offers custom baskets made to order.

Contact: *Eco-Choice Inc.*
P.O. Box 281
Montvale, NJ 07645
(201) 930-9046

☛ Energy- and water-saving devices for the home such as compact fluorescent bulbs, toilet water dams, and low-flow shower heads.

☛ Canvas shopping/tote bags (see, for example, catalogs from Greenpeace, Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy).

☛ T-shirts and cotton sheeting shirts screenprinted with nature-oriented designs. Many environmental organizations sell such shirts. One company which specializes in them is *Environmental Awareness Products*.

Contact: *Environmental Awareness Products*
3600 Goodwin Road
Ionia, MI 48846
(517) 647-2535

☛ For children, consider subscriptions to *Ranger Rick* (ages 5-10) or *My Big Backyard* (ages 2-4), both published by the *National Wildlife Federation*.

Adults may appreciate a subscription to one of the major environmental journals/magazines such as *Sierra*, *Audubon*, *National Wildlife*, etc. (See Chapter Five for more names and addresses).

☛ For \$50, you can purchase and protect an acre of tropical rainforest in Belize. A gift certificate will be sent to the person in whose name you make the purchase.

Contact: *Programme for Belize*
P.O. Box 1088
Vineyard Haven, MA 02568

✿ Finally, remember that every time you buy a product, you “vote” for it. Wise purchasing can make your votes count for an improved environment. However, you can really increase your influence by writing to companies whose products you feel are environmentally unsound and telling them why you won’t buy them. Also, ask your grocer to stock more items in bulk and to offer rebates to customers who bring their own bags and containers. If a store has a “green products” aisle or section, patronize it, and let the management of stores that stock and specially mark “green” items, know that you appreciate their concern. Patronize responsible establishments and urge your friends to do the same.

BUYING GUIDE

Listed are several mail-order sources for alternative products which are environmentally preferable to their conventional counterparts.

Co-op America is an umbrella organization linking consumers to hundreds of businesses in the alternative marketplace. Member organizations offer products such as natural-fiber clothing, organic cosmetics, furniture, food, Third World products, etc.

Contact: *Co-op America*
2100 M Street, N.W. Suite 310
Washington, DC 20063
(202) 872-5307

The Fund for Renewable Energy and the Environment (FREE) publishes a catalog, available for \$2, listing a variety of energy-saving and environmentally progressive products.

Contact: *FREE*
101 Connecticut Ave., N.W.
Suite 638
Washington, D.C. 20036

Seventh Generation offers a variety of recycled paper products, non-toxic cleaners, energy-efficient fluorescent lightbulbs, solar-powered gadgets, and environmental testing kits. A catalog is available for \$2.

Contact: *Seventh Generation*
10 Farrell Street
South Burlington, VT 05403
(802) 862-2999

Earth Care Paper Company offers a wide variety of recycled paper products including office paper, stationery, etc. They also sell cellulose food-storage bags.

Contact: *Earth Care Paper*
P.O. Box 3335-GM
Madison, WI 53704
(608) 256-5232

Bio-Pax offers recycled and biodegradable packaging and office products, including boxes, cushioning, wrappers, tape, copy paper, and legal pads. Send \$2 (refundable) for a catalog.

Contact: *Bio-Pax, Diversified Packaging Products, Inc.*
MS 4001, 1265 Pine Hill Drive
Annapolis, MD 21401
(301) 974-4411

Livos makes paints, stains, and wood preservatives which don’t emit toxic fumes.

Contact: *Livos*
2641 Cerrillos Rd.
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 988-9111

Several companies, including *Necessary Trading Company* and the *Natural Gardening Research Center*, offer natural gardening and pest control products.

Contact: *Necessary Trading Company*
P.O. Box 305
New Castle, VA 24127
(703) 864-5103

Natural Gardening Research Center
P.O. Box 14
Sunman, IN 47041
(812) 623-3800

Solar Electric has products to solarize your home, boat, or cabin. 80-page catalog \$4.50.

Contact: *Solar Electric*
175 Cascade Court
Rohnert Park, CA 94928
(800) 832-1986

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Copies of the booklets "The Most Energy Efficient Appliances" and "Saving Energy and Money with Home Appliances" are available for \$2 each.

Contact: *American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy*
1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Suite 535
Washington, DC 20036

Guides to more responsible buying include: *Shopping for a Better World* (\$5.95), which lists companies and ranks them by environmental and social-responsibility criteria.

Contact: *Council on Economic Priorities*
30 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003
(212) 420-1133

The Green Consumer (\$8.95), an American edition of Britain's bestselling guide to environmentally safe or low-impact consumer goods.

Contact: *Viking Penguin*
40 West 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 337-5200 or (800) 526-0275

For a list of diaper services in your area:

Contact: *National Association of Diaper Services*,
(800) 462-6237

Greenpeace has compiled a free factsheet, "Stepping Lightly on the Earth: Everyone's Guide to Toxics in the Home." It lists safe and effective alternatives to toxic or polluting household products such as furniture and metal polishes, laundry, dish, oven, drain, tub/tile, and glass cleaners, air fresheners, and pest control agents.

Contact: *Greenpeace Action*
1436 U St. N.W. Suite 201A
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 462-1177

Two books by Debra Lynn Dodd, *The Nontoxic Home, A Consumer's Guide to Safe Household Products* and *Nontoxic and Natural*, offer practical advice on how to make or where to buy nontoxic alternatives to just about every household product.

Contact: Debra Lynn Dodd
Box 1506
Mill Valley, CA 94942

For information on avoiding products made with CFC's and other ozone-depleting chemicals, request a copy of the booklet "Protecting the Ozone Layer: What You Can Do."

Contact: *Environmental Defense Fund*
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
(212) 505-2100

For information on which wildlife products are illegal, get a copy of the "Buyer Beware" Guide published by *World Wildlife Fund*.

Contact: *World Wildlife Fund*
Traffic (USA)
1250 24th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20037
(800) 634-4444

For a list of tropical woods and products to avoid and safe alternatives to buy, send for the "Tropical Timber Factsheet" by the *Rainforest Action Network*.

Contact: *RAN*
301 Broadway, Suite A
San Francisco, CA 94133
(415) 398-4404

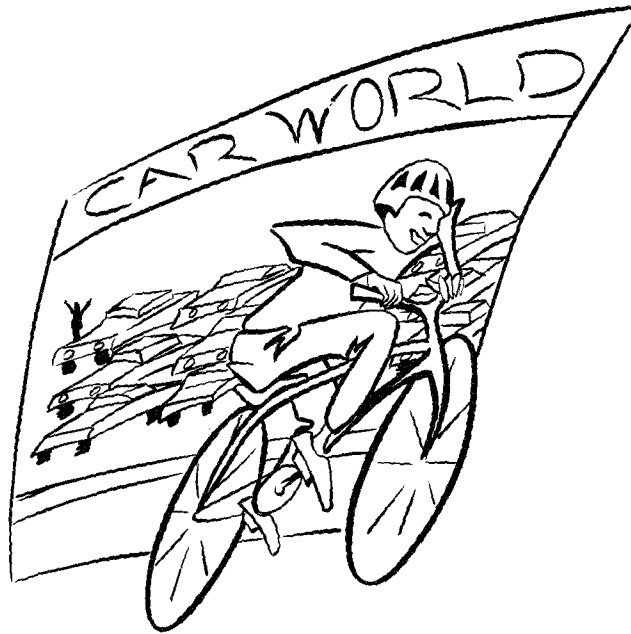
Chapter Two

Living Light: Towards a Minimum-Impact Lifestyle

One of the most effective ways for you to act on your environmental concerns is to make changes which reduce the environmental impact of your lifestyle. Since it is through energy use that we each make our biggest personal contribution to environmental degradation, many of

these suggestions are intended to help you minimize both your direct and your indirect energy demands. Others will help you to cut your resource consumption and minimize the pollution you generate at home, work or school.

Keep in mind, though, that pollution and resource depletion are only part of the problem: population growth, unless soon halted, will offset any gains we may make in reduced per-capita impact. And, though our population is growing more slowly than are those of less-developed countries, the impact of our growth is disproportionately large due to our higher standard of living. Thus, perhaps the single



most important contribution you can make is one of omission: *limit* the number of children you bring into the world.

AT HOME

The following suggestions are intended only as a rough guide; be creative and

modify or add to them as you see fit. Most of these steps are economical and practical for apartment and dorm dwellers as well as for home owners.

- ✿ Minimize heating and cooling needs by insulating, caulking, weatherstripping, and sealing all leaks.
- ✿ For little or no charge, most utility companies will perform an energy audit of your home. A representative will examine your home and recommend ways to reduce your energy consumption. For more information, contact your local utility company.
- ✿ Install storm doors and windows; use insulating – window shades and curtains.

🌱 Set the thermostat a few degrees higher in summer and lower in winter. Seal off unused areas of your home; only heat/cool those areas you use frequently.

🌱 Turn off all electrical appliances and lights when not in use. Don't leave the TV, radio, or lights on in unoccupied rooms.

🌱 Instant-on televisions use energy even when they're turned off. If you have one, unplug it when it's off, or use a wall switch to cut off the power to that outlet.

🌱 Keep your refrigerator and freezer as full as possible. Fill up empty space in a freezer with stacks of newspapers.

🌱 Lower the setting on your water heater to 110°F - 120°F, or "low." Turn it off or use the "vacation" setting if you'll be away from your home for several days. If your water heater is not well-insulated, buy and install an insulating jacket for it.

🌱 Use cold water for clothes washing, dish rinsing, and anything else which does not require hot water.

🌱 Use a clothesline, indoors or outdoors, instead of a clothes dryer. Wash and dry dishes by hand some or all of the time instead of using a dishwasher. If you do use a dishwasher, air-dry your dishes when possible.

🌱 Don't use electric insect-zappers. They're not effective against pests such as mosquitos, but attract and needlessly kill harmless insects such as moths and beetles. To repel mosquitos, try burning citronella-oil lamps or candles.

🌱 Plant trees around your home to reduce your cooling needs, and encourage your community, school, or employer to join a reforestation program.

🌱 For more information on energy conservation, energy-saving devices, and reforestation programs, see For More Information at the end of this section.

🌱 Recycle all materials which are recyclable in your area. This usually includes glass, newspaper, cardboard, and aluminum. Other metals, plastics, and mixed paper are recyclable in many areas. Call your local recycler to learn what you may recycle and how to handle and sort those materials. If your community sponsors a recycling program, participate. If not, see about setting up a program in your area. Contact your local sanitation department and offer to help them design and implement a community-wide recycling program. Lots of information and help to get a recycling program started is available (see For More Information).

🌱 To reduce your consumption of paper and to liberate yourself from the tyranny of junk-mailers, write the *Mail Preference Service* of the *Direct Marketing Association*, 6 East 43rd Street, New York, NY 10017. This will stop your name from being sold to mailing-list companies. To get off lists you are already on, write the companies directly.

🌱 Donate old clothing, furniture, appliances, books, etc. to organizations such as Goodwill and Salvation Army, rather than throwing these things away.

🌱 Be careful disposing of potentially toxic household products. Some, such as household cleaners, disinfectants, drain cleaners, lye-based paint strippers, and antifreeze can safely be rinsed down the

drain if properly diluted with water. Others, including most oil- and solvent-based cleaners, furniture and metal polishes, waxes, paints, and glues, as well as all garden chemicals, should be handled as solid or hazardous wastes and either taken to a landfill or saved for a community-wide hazardous waste collection day. See For More Information to find out where to obtain guides to the safe disposal of household wastes.

- ✿ Reduce your water use. Install low-flow toilets, flow-restricting shower heads, and faucet aerators; these are readily available at plumbing supply and hardware stores.

- ✿ Reduce your toilet's water consumption by installing a water dam or using a water-filled bottle or plastic bag to reduce the tank's capacity.

- ✿ Fix all visible water leaks such as dripping faucets. To check for invisible line leaks, turn off all water-using appliances, including your icemaker; read your water meter, then read it again in half an hour. A discrepancy indicates a leak. To check your toilet, put food coloring in the tank and wait 15 minutes. If the dye shows up in the bowl, you have a seal leak which you can fix with a simple kit from your hardware store.

- ✿ Don't use water from a hose to sweep off driveways, walks, and patios; use a broom instead.

- ✿ Turn off the water when you're brushing your teeth, shaving, or washing dishes. Don't let it run when you're not using it.

- ✿ Try to save rinse water ("gray water") for use in watering plants or irrigating lawns and gardens,

especially in arid regions and in cities with limited water supplies. Several guides for setting up household gray water systems are available; see For More Information at the end of this section.

- ✿ In arid climates, landscape with plants which do not need supplemental watering. For appropriate species, consult your local nursery or agricultural extension service.

- ✿ Keep your lawn mowed no shorter than 2-3" high. This discourages weed growth and helps the grass conserve water.

- ✿ Water your lawn only when it doesn't spring back after you've stepped on it. Water lawns and gardens early in the morning or late in the evening to minimize evaporation.

- ✿ Don't use a kitchen sink garbage disposal; these are very water-intensive and wasteful. Nearly all food scraps, including fruits, vegetables, coffee grounds, eggshells, and grains will compost. To find out how to start a compost bin or heap, contact the sources in For More Information at the end of this section. If composting is not an option for you, put your scraps in the garbage.

- ✿ Compost grass clippings, wood ash, and leaves rather than sending them to the landfill. Clippings, leaves, and chipped-up branches also make good mulch for your yard or garden; mulching plants helps to conserve water and suppress weeds.

- ✿ Landscape with permeable surfaces wherever possible. Avoid paving and bricking in mortar.