

The Morning File with Peter Leo

How you can reduce carbon emissions

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By Peter Leo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Big carbon foot

Today, we're going to discuss fun stuff, such as carbon emissions and human waste, and handy ways to save money.

Everyone knows we lead the world in carbon emissions (which are very bad), accounting for 22 percent, followed by China (17 percent) and Russia, India and Japan (6 percent or less each). The good news is, instead of getting all gloomy and depressed about our huge carbon footprint, as they say in environmental circles, and drowning our sorrows by buying a couple more SUVs, we can do something. In fact, an individual American can have the greatest impact in reducing carbon emissions.



Big savings

Are you aware of how lethal your home is for your budget, not to mention the environment? Twenty-two percent of all energy in the United States is used for residential purposes. Because electrical generation is so inefficient, it accounts for 71 percent of household emissions. In fact, a home's electrical use may be responsible for more CO2 emissions than the two cars in the driveway, according to The Christian Science Monitor. Here are some easy ways to develop a more petite carbon footprint.

■ If you change only 25 percent of your home's bulbs, you can cut a lighting bill in half, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates. Incandescent bulbs waste 90 percent of their energy as heat, and compact fluorescents, which can be up to five times more efficient, last years longer as well.

■ Kitchen appliances consume 27 percent of the average American household's electricity. More than half of that goes to your refrigerator. So any fridge more than 10 years old is worth getting rid of, says The Monitor. And don't just put it in the basement and plug it in. It's not going to be anymore energy efficient down there.

■ Plugging electronics into power strips, which can then be turned off, will further increase savings, by decreasing "phantom loads." (Even in the "off" position, electronic gear often continues to draw small amounts of electricity.)

(For a home energy saver calculator go to hes.lbl.gov.)



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Earth's life expectancy gains a few days

The always-positive Monitor is also the source of some rare good news on the global warming front. Atmospheric methane -- a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide -- has held steady for the past seven years, following 20 years of increases. Scientists making the measurements say the change may result from fewer leaks in pipelines and oil and gas storage facilities. (Did they include Iraq?) Also, emissions from coal-mining and natural-gas production may have been reduced.

It's unclear how long the trend will hold. But "we will gain some ground on global warming if methane is not as large a contributor in the future as it has been in the past century," said Sherwood Rowland, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist at the University of California at Irvine.



We'd rather not be downwind

Here's another environmental project we can all contribute to. A Canadian company is creating an alternative green fuel from human sewage. Scientists at biofuel group Dynamotive say the oil produced from human waste can be used instead of fossil fuels to generate heat and power in diesel engines and boilers. They have done it on a pilot scale and are looking at ways to make it a commercial success. The company has already commercialized oil production using wood separated from construction waste and coffee bean shells.

"We're now looking at dirtier wastes like chicken litter, cow manure and household garbage," Dynamotive president Andrew Kingston told The Guardian. Such biofuels are considered environmentally benign because the carbon produced is absorbed from the atmosphere by plants or trees.



A Trumped up project

Donald Trump wants to build a \$2 billion golf resort development in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, despite fears from bird-protection and other environmental groups. The project sparked a ruckus on one of the always lively message boards on Scotsman.com.

Exhibit A is a response from Dave of Western Isles, defending the golf project against the birders: "Eco-tourism is an oxymoron. There is nothing 'ecological' about travelling all around the world/country twitching at birds, etc. At least some fat, rich people can get some exercise and fresh air in a really nice part of Scotland whilst spending wads of their cash in the general locale of the place without any pretense of caring about the environment, unlike these dipsticks who travel thousands of miles to see a red-necked throat warbler or some other feathered marvel."

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