

Twelve steps to reduce impact on environment

As we head into 2012, many of us will be resolving to lose those few extra pounds, save more money or spend a few more hours with our families and friends. But there are also some resolutions we can make to make our lives a little greener. Each of us, especially in the U.S., can make a commitment to reducing our environmental impacts.

"The global community, and particularly people living in industrialized societies, have put unsustainable demands on our planet's limited resources," says Robert Engelman, president of the Worldwatch Institute, a global environmental research organization. "If we expect to be able to feed, shelter, and provide even basic living conditions to our growing population in years to come, we must act now to change."

The United Nations has designated 2012 as the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All. Broadening access to sustainable energy is essential to solving many of the world's challenges, including food production, security and poverty.

Hunger, poverty, and climate change are issues that we can all help address. Here are 12 simple

steps to go green in 2012:

1. Recycle. Recycling programs help save energy and protect the environment. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, for each pound of aluminum recovered, Americans save the energy resources necessary to generate roughly 7.5 kilowatt-hours of electricity – enough to power a city the size of Pittsburgh for six years.

2. Turn off the lights. On the last Saturday in March – hundreds of people, businesses, and governments around the world turn off their lights for an hour as part of Earth Hour, a movement to address climate change. Earth Hour happens only once a year, but you can make an impact every day by turning off lights during bright daylight or whenever you will be away for an extended period of time.

3. Make the switch. Compact fluorescent lamps use only 20-30 percent of the energy required by incandescents to create the same amount of light, and LEDs use only 10 percent, helping reduce both electric bills and carbon emissions.

4. Turn on the tap. Fill up your glasses and reusable water bottles with water from the sink. By elimi-

nating bottled water you can help to keep nearly 1 million tons of bottles out of the landfill, as well as save money on water costs.

5. Turn down the heat. Turning down the heat by 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit for eight hours can result in savings of 5-15 percent on your home heating bill. Turn down your thermostat when you leave for work, or use a programmable thermostat to control your heating settings.

6. Support food recovery programs. Each year, roughly a third of all food produced for human consumption gets lost or wasted. Go through your cabinets and shelves and donate any non-perishable canned and dried foods that you won't be using to your nearest food bank or shelter.

7. Buy local. "Small Business Saturday," falling between "Black Friday" and "Cyber Monday," was established in 2010 as a way to support small businesses during the busiest shopping time of the year. Local small businesses are more sustainable because they are often more accountable for their actions, have smaller environmental footprints, and innovate to meet local conditions.

8. Get out and ride. We all know

that carpooling and using public transportation helps cut down on greenhouse gas emissions, as well as our gas bills. Now, cities across the country are investing in bike sharing programs that allow people to rent bikes for short-term use. Even if without bike share programs, many cities and towns are incorporating bike lanes and trails, making it easier and safer to use your bike for transportation and recreation.

9. Share a car. Even if you don't want to get rid of your own car, using a shared car when traveling can greatly reduce your environmental impact.

10. Plant a garden. Growing your own vegetables is a simple way to bring fresh and nutritious food to your doorstep. Growing a garden doesn't have to take up a lot of space, and in light of high food prices and recent food safety scares, even a small plot can make a big impact on your diet and wallet.

11. Compost. And what better way to fertilize your garden than using your own composted organic waste. You will not only reduce costs by buying less fertilizer, but you will also help to cut down on food and other organic waste.

12. Reduce your meat consumption. Livestock production accounts for about 18 percent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. Yet global meat production has experienced a 20 percent growth rate since 2000. You don't have to become a vegetarian or vegan, but by simply cutting down on the amount of meat you consume can go a long way. Consider substituting one meal day with a vegetarian

option. The most successful and lasting New Year's resolutions are those that are practiced regularly and have an important goal. Thankfully, simple practices, such as recycling or riding a bike, can have great impact. As we prepare to ring in the new year, let's all resolve to make 2012 a healthier, happier, and greener year for all.

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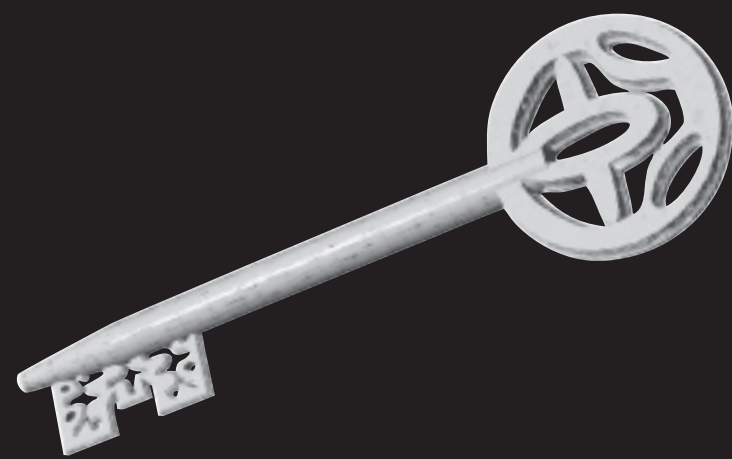
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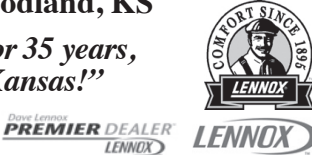
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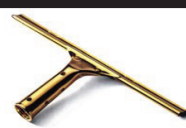
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