



# How to Eat a Green Elephant

A SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT FOR THE WORKPLACE & HOME LIFE

## Bite 1

# How do you eat a Green Elephant?

## **One green bite at a time.**

How do you tackle the daunting task of achieving sustainability? One green step at a time. It's easy to get swallowed by the enormity of the problems facing our environment, our economy and our community. So you're tempted to ask how one person can make a difference? Sure, it would be great if everyone donated massive amounts of time and money to non-profits, but the reality is, that approach isn't sustainable either. The good news is that we can make a significant difference through the decisions we're already making everyday. The food we buy, the gadgets we use and the businesses we support have tremendous influence over how our world operates. So making those same decisions more responsibly goes a long way in creating the changes we want to see.

## **But how does your decision to buy a hamburger affect global warming?**

To understand the connection between our lifestyles and our surroundings we need to look at the entire system that governs how our things are made, distributed, consumed and disposed of. This manual is divided into 4 sections, each providing a principle with a perspective on this system and suggestions on how you can break down the task of sustainability into bite-sized, manageable decisions. Each principle answers the question, what do we need to do, as a civilization and as individuals, to create a sustainable society?

Bon appetit.

## Eliminate our contribution to the progressive buildup of substances extracted from the Earth's crust.



### What's the problem?

The main way we violate Principle 1 is in our energy use. The fuel that we use to provide heat, electricity and transportation to a large extent comes from elements in the earth's crust. Then once we're warm, have light or have gotten to where we were going, we leave a trail of those same elements in the biosphere. Even though our own energy use is a contributing factor to the problem, through our purchasing decisions we're also indirectly supporting a fossil-fuel based system which is inflicting even more damage than we could ever do individually. When we buy products that are either made or packaged unsustainably, we lend our monetary support to companies that contribute roughly 70 times as much to the problem as you do.

Therefore the ways in which we minimize our effect on the earth, as it pertains to this first principle, are:

- 1- Reduce our personal energy usage**
- 2- Replace traditional energy sources with more eco-friendly ones**
- 3- Support products and services that do the same**

# 1. Reduce Energy usage:

## At Work

- **Turn off computers when not in use.**

If completely turning off and unplugging your computer is not an option, then the next best thing is to use your PC's Standby mode (on a Mac it's "Sleep"). Even when off, electronic devices use up what some call "vampire" energy, so engaging the power saving Standby or Sleep modes diminishes the amount of energy your computer is sucking. Setting up an automatic Standby procedure on your PC helps cover you on those days you're in a rush to leave the office and forget to power down yourself.<sup>1</sup>

- **Replace incandescent bulbs with CFLs.**

They might be more expensive up-front, but CFLs use 50 - 80% less energy, are more efficient with that energy and last 10 times longer than their incandescent cousins.<sup>2</sup>

- **Take advantage of the USPS Green resources for mailing.**

Using their Cradle-to-Cradle shipping boxes diminishes the amount of energy needed to create new boxes, buying stamps online instead of going to the P.O. saves time and gas.<sup>3</sup>

- **Use your blinds to regulate heat.**

During the winter, direct sunlight can help to keep the office warm while closing blinds in the summer has the inverse effect.<sup>4</sup>



## At Home

- **Turn off lights when not in use.**

It won't only make your mom happy but your wallet will thank you too.

- **Turn off, or ideally unplug, small appliances when not in use.**<sup>5</sup>

- **Buy Energy Star rated appliances.**

That logo represents a 10 - 50% higher energy efficiency

- **Wash dishes and clothes only when loads are full.**

Less frequent washing means less energy used every month.

- **Let your dishes air or drip dry.**

Turning off the heat dry setting on dishwashers saves about 15% of its energy.<sup>6</sup>

- **Buy a low-water, front-loading washing machine.**

These newer machines use less water and 20-50% less energy<sup>7</sup>

- **Use high efficiency detergents that can be used in cold water.**

Less energy is used since the machine doesn't have to heat up the water to use it.

- **Air dry clothes instead of in a dryer.**

We all might not have access to our own backyards for this but if you do the benefits to your clothes and your bank account are worth the extra time.

### Watch less TV:

You know library books are an abundant supply of one of the best renewable resources: knowledge.

### Insulate water heaters.

Wrapping your heater in a blankie can shave 4 - 9% off of your heating costs.<sup>8</sup>

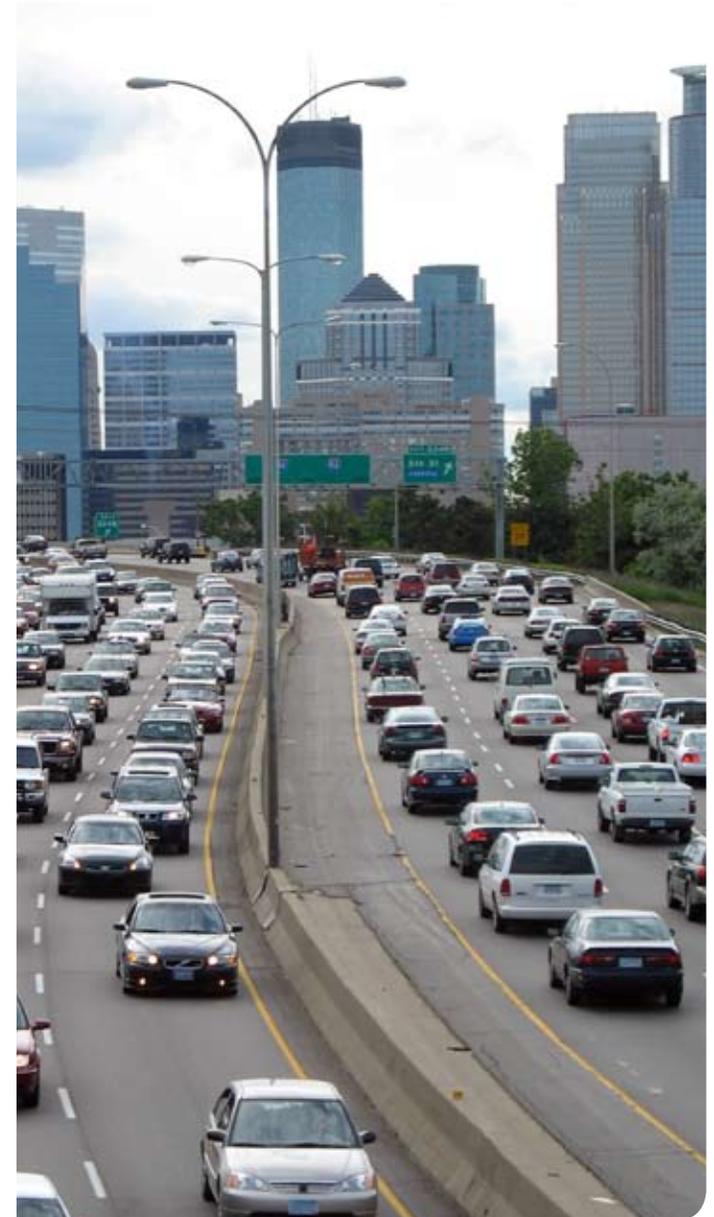
### Install a programmable thermostat.

Setting it to EnergyStar recommended temperatures (e.g. 68 in the winter, 78 in the summer) keeps your AC unit from having to run unnecessarily during the day.<sup>9</sup>



## **In Transportation**

- **Carpool as often as you can.**
- **Drive less.** Live closer to work, ride a bicycle, take public transportation.
- **Buy a hybrid, or high efficiency vehicle.**
- **Keep tires inflated properly.** Cars get better mileage when the tires are properly inflated. The U.S. Department of Energy says that for every 1-psi drop in pressure, you can expect your gas mileage to lower by 0.4 percent.<sup>10</sup>
- **Adopt hypermiling or fuel economic driving techniques.** Tips like avoiding stop and go traffic, keeping speeds constant and driving with the windows up on Highways help to conserve fuel and have been known to extend the expected mileage of your vehicle.<sup>11, 12</sup>



## 2. Replace Energy Sources

- **Install solar panels.**

Subsidizing even a small amount of your energy usage with a renewable source goes a long way and it's not as hard as it seems to install a simple PV solar cell yourself.<sup>13</sup>

- **Buy Green-e certified electricity or offset traditional electricity with carbon credits.**

Support Green energy sources by adding a few extra dollars each month.<sup>14</sup>

- **Convert your car to run on biodiesel.**

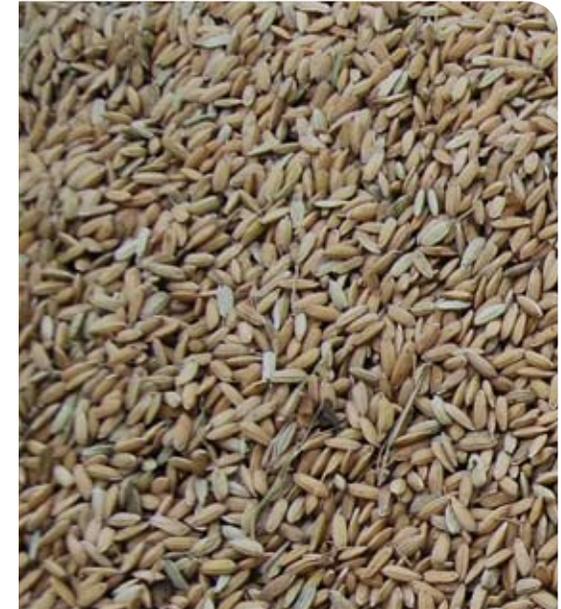
For the mechanically adventurous, fuel economy, cost and environmental benefits await.<sup>15</sup>



Biodiesel extracted from Sunflowers.  
Image from Diselenews Australia

### 3. Support Like-Minded Products and Services

- **Buy and Eat local.** Whether it's lunch at a local restaurant or groceries for home, local spending encourages businesses with minimal transportation costs.
- **Choose products that use minimal packaging and the stores that carry them.** Less is more. Less paper and plastics mean more energy saved from making, shipping, disposing or recycling them.
- **Buy in bulk.** Flour, rice and grains in bulk cost less per unit, use less packaging and require fewer shopping trips.
- **Support green candidates.** Vote for, and donate to, local politicians that champion the energy causes you believe in.



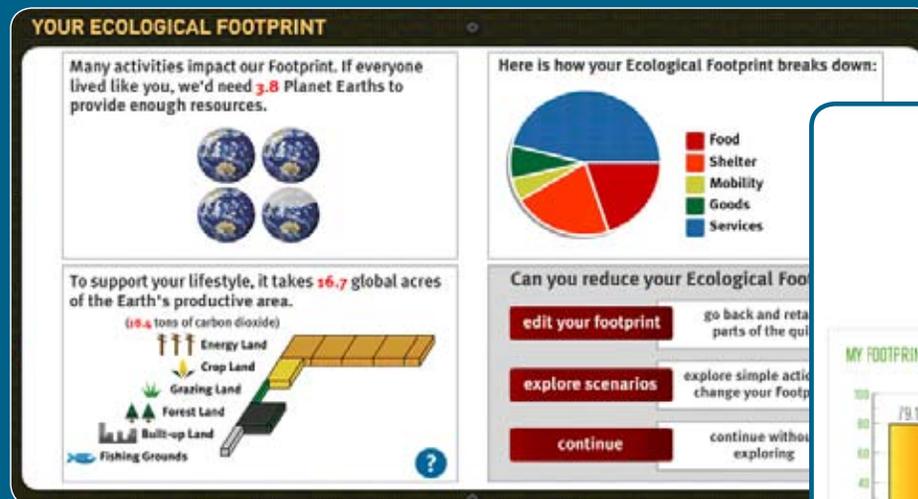
Sites like evo.com sell kids toys and other gifts that ship with minimal packaging.

# Excercise 1: Calculate Your Carbon Footprint

You can't appreciate how your energy use is improving if you don't start with a baseline of how much you're using right now. One way of doing this is to calculate your carbon footprint. Since most of our energy comes from carbon-based fossil fuels, this tool can serve as a useful energy guage. There are a lot of carbon calculators available and it's not an exact science so you're bound to get varying readings based on the one you choose. The point isn't the accuracy so much as the education you get when you realize how many earths are needed to sustain life if everyone lived like you did.

## CARBON CALCULATORS

- [carbonfootprint.com](http://carbonfootprint.com)
- [myfootprint.org](http://myfootprint.org)
- [ecofoot.net](http://ecofoot.net)
- [climatecrisis.net/takeaction/carboncalculator](http://climatecrisis.net/takeaction/carboncalculator)



*Sample footprint from ecofoot.net*



*A sample footprint breakdown according to myfootprint.org.*

All images, unless otherwise noted, from stock.xchng

## Principle 1 Sources

- 1 [www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/tabletpc/getstarted/standby.msp](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/tabletpc/getstarted/standby.msp)
- 2 [www.eartheasy.com/live\\_energyeff\\_lighting.htm](http://www.eartheasy.com/live_energyeff_lighting.htm)
- 3 [www.usps.com./green/welcome.htm](http://www.usps.com./green/welcome.htm)
- 4 [www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=bygtw.view\\_showOffice](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=bygtw.view_showOffice)
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- 11 [ecomodder.com/forum/EM-hypermilng-driving-tips-ecodriving.php](http://ecomodder.com/forum/EM-hypermilng-driving-tips-ecodriving.php)
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- 14 [www.green-e.org/](http://www.green-e.org/)
- 15 [dieselnews.wordpress.com/2008/04/22/biodiesel-for-beginners-part-1-what-the-hell-is-it/](http://dieselnews.wordpress.com/2008/04/22/biodiesel-for-beginners-part-1-what-the-hell-is-it/)