

Save Money -and have a Greener New Year

By Barbara Balfour

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As we move into 2010, saving money is at the forefront of everyone's thoughts. Yet what many may not realize is that more efficient cash flow is one of the direct benefits of a more environmentally friendly lifestyle – and going green involves far less effort than you might think.

"Don't feel you have to become a green god or goddess overnight to make a big difference," says Calgary-based environmental writer Emma Gilchrist. "Just choose one thing and start doing it, whether it's unplugging your unused appliances, avoiding bottled water or carrying a reusable mug for buying coffee."

The three areas in which individuals contribute the most to greenhouse gases are housing, transportation and food. Gilchrist, who works in communications with sustainable-energy think tank the Pembina Institute, offers the following simple tips that will minimize your footprint in these areas – and can slash your household costs by as much as one-third: 1. Don't buy bottled water. It's more expensive than gasoline, and takes immense resources to bottle and ship. It's also no cleaner or safer than filtered tap water – which is all that many brands actually are, but at 1,200 times the price.

2. Draft-proof your house. A tremendous amount of energy goes into heating the

home. But before you invest in expensive renovations such as upgrading your furnace, ensure you have a good building envelope. Even if you have less than \$100 to spend, a caulking gun and some weather-stripping are inexpensive ways to help keep the heat indoors.

3. Conserve water. One in every four toilets leaks water from the tank into the basin. This could cost you up to an extra \$100 per year, per toilet. Fixing it will cost you about \$5. Put a few drops of food colouring into the tank and wait 10 minutes to see if the colour shows up in the bowl. If it does, it's because the flapper, a part that covers the connection between the tank and the basin, needs to be replaced. Get one at the hardware store.

4. Turn off and unplug your appliances. A television or stereo on standby can draw as much power when off as when it's on. A cellphone charger or computer plugged into the wall is drawing energy even when it's not being used. Check out a Kill-a-Watt meter from the Calgary Public Library to help you find out which devices around your home are draining power when they're off. This can reduce your energy bill by 35 per cent.

5. Get a programmable thermostat. When you're at work during the day, program the temperature to go down so that you are not

heating an empty house. You can also lower the temperature at night when you are in bed.

6. Buy local whenever you can. The average meal travels 4,000 kilometres to get to your plate. Some supermarkets are now promoting locally or regionally sourced foods; seek them out. At local farmers' markets, you can ask questions about how the food was grown. It may cost a bit more, but consider that we're also spending a lower proportion of our incomes on food than ever before.

7. Reduce your possessions. Most North Americans have more than they need. Keep it out of the landfill by giving it to someone else, or donating it to charity. Curb your spending habits, and buy ethically made products wherever possible.

8. Use green cleaning products. Look for EcoLogo certification. Take your old products to a chemical dropoff site, which you can find at www.calgary.ca or by calling 3-1-1.

9. Pack litterless lunches. Use a mug every time you buy coffee. Instead of buying yogurt in individual packages, get it in bulk and divvy it up yourself at home using reusable containers.

10. Avoid commuting in a single-occupancy vehicle. Carpool, bike or take the bus to work. Join a car-share program at www.calgarycarshare.ca.

A final tip, which shouldn't really need mentioning: Recycle. It's easy, and we're paying for it, so make as much use of your blue cart as you can. Get more information on what is and isn't recyclable at www.calgary.ca/bluecart. NYNY