

## Tip at the Top

Try energy saving light bulbs, they use 20% less energy & can last 4 times as long as a standard bulb!

# THE GREEN ISSUE

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## Introduction

Hello, and welcome to The Green Issue. Our aim is to raise awareness about the impact we are having on the planet's future and to spur people in to making everyday changes that really can change the future of our planet.

This week we're examining closely the dramatic impact that housing development has on the environment; by raising awareness we hope that people will be able to make informed choices about the houses they live in.

We will also be looking at the benefits of energy saving light bulbs, and how changing one of your domestic products can have a positive impact on the environment.

Our first story is one that tells of the tragedy nature can cause and that has recently brought the power of nature to the public eye: the devastating Hurricane Dean.

## Wild Weather Strikes Again

After months plagued by flooding, soaring temperatures and storms, yet more people faced the reality of nature's power as Hurricane Dean struck parts of the Caribbean. In Jamaica the storm caused devastation as it uprooted trees, destroyed homes and caused wide spread flooding. By the time the hurricane reached the Mexican Coast its intensity had been upgraded to grade five; meaning the hurricane created sustained wind speeds of more than 165mph and gusts of up to 200mph.

Whilst there is no direct connection between any one hurricane and global warming, it is widely believed by climate scientists that there is a direct cause and effect situation occurring between the two phenomena. In fact, of the ten most intense hurricanes on record six have occurred within the last ten years. This is thought to be because sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic, where most American hurricanes stem from, have risen by approximately two degrees in the last twenty years, thus increasing the intensity of the hurricanes that do occur. However, it is argued that the exact relationship between the two

occurrences may never be exactly known.

Whether or not a link between global warming and extreme weather exists, there is no doubt that it certainly makes people realise the delicate relationship between themselves and the elements.

Every action and decision we make affects the climate of the world we live in; the exact nature of these changes are not yet known. But we need to act now, before the devastation that has occurred across the Atlantic becomes a more common incidence in our every day lives.



## New Homes: At What Cost?

Every year approximately 160,000 new homes are built within the UK and as long as demand continues to exceed supply in the housing market this figure is going to rise. The government aims to increase the number of new houses built each year to 240,000 by the year 2016 in order to provide a solution to the lack of affordable housing currently available.

As escalating numbers of our open spaces are being developed to create extra homes we must step back and consider the tremendous affect this has on our environment and what we can do to minimise the damage.

It is clear that as houses are built on what would once have been recreational ground or open pastures that the impact on animal habitats and wildlife will be severe. Not only this, but as houses are built and tarmac drives are laid this also decreases the natural absorption capacity of the land, thus making these new houses more prone to flood damage if the man-made drainage facilities become overwhelmed. Add to this the carbon emissions created by the construction of new properties and those created by inhabitants once the homes are owned, the environmental impact of such developments quickly becomes startling.

It is impossible to argue, however, that new homes are not needed; the average house price in the UK is £210,000 and with the average wage being approximately £447 a week (translated to £22,000 a year) this means the average house is still costing nearly ten times the average salary.

So is there a happy medium between consumer's needs and environmental cost? 'Eco homes' could provide the solution.

It is true that construction companies and developers must meet certain criteria when building new homes; however, it is widely

believed that these requirements are not enough considering the huge impact such development has on the environment. For example, although insulation standards must be high, which is a hugely positive thing for both reducing heating bills and minimising carbon emissions, there are few regulations when it comes to the sustainability of the materials used. In fact on such matters most companies are self-regulating, which is essentially driven by client demand.

Developers seek to build houses that consumer's demand; therefore, if we, as a public body, make environmental issues a higher priority when buying a house the developer will have to respond accordingly. This means they will have to instruct builders to use more environmentally friendly products in both the construction, and furnishing, of new homes.

Every new house built in the UK must comply with building regulations, and in January 2006 Part L of the building regulations was created which deals with the conservation of fuels and power. In the creation of this legal requirement the UK housing business was taking an extremely positive step towards other European countries that have considerably higher thermal standards than the UK.



In compliance with Part L of the Building regulations all new or renovated dwellings must achieve a 'U-Value'; this is a measure of the heat loss and gain within a property. This, in itself, is a definite improvement and decreases energy consumption within new homes significantly. Yet, many buildings, particularly apartment blocks, are being built on a structure mainly comprised of concrete. Concrete is essentially a mixture of sand, aggregate, cement and water and has definite positive thermo-insulation properties as it both keeps heat in and out, thus reducing both heating and air-conditioning costs.



However, the production of cement based building materials accounts for between 5%-10% of all carbon dioxide emissions. Clearly this is due to the vast amount of uses to which such materials are put: underground stations, runways, tarmac drives and road bridges to name but a few. Although alternatives to cement and concrete are mainly expensive there is a simple, viable route to minimising concrete use in housing construction.

When constructing houses it is possible to use a timber frame construction which, if the timber is acquired from FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) managed forests, is an entirely sustainable resource.

As consumers and home-owners it is up to us to demand an increase in such properties; if

developers become aware that increasing numbers of people are looking for homes built in a manner that doesn't have such a negative impact on the environment then they will have to sit up and listen and build more houses using sustainable materials.

Moreover, we need to question the government as to why there are no guidelines about the sustainability of materials used in the construction of new properties. Whilst there is no doubt new houses are needed in this country it does not have to be at the expense of our environmental interests. There are alternatives but, as ever, the people in charge need to be made accountable for their actions and realise that alternatives are available, even if they are more expensive.

Of course, if you are extremely passionate about having an eco-friendly home there are many more ways to achieve this, one of which is to self-build such a property. In the next issue of The Green Issue we will explore further the environmental benefits of the eco friendly home.



## Saving Energy

As the effects of global warming become increasingly evident within our day to day lives, and as fossil fuels become depleted most people are acutely aware of the necessity to reduce their Carbon Footprint and that the main way to do this is by saving energy. By saving electricity around the home you are not only helping to save the planet but you will also notice a difference in your own electricity bills. It's a win-win situation!

It is sometimes easy to underestimate the effect small changes can make, so here we'll examine one small thing you can change around your own home, and the impact it will have both on the planet and your pocket!



My first tip would be to use energy saving light bulbs. Although they are often dismissed as 'too bulky', 'having a poor quality of light' or just being 'too expensive' I have found them excellent, particularly in areas where lights need to be on for long periods and the light doesn't need to be especially bright. Even if you are reluctant to try them in your main living areas they are marvellous for hallways, garages and porches, and I find them to be great in the bathroom too!

As well as the environmental benefits of energy saving light bulbs (as they use about 20% less energy than a standard bulb) they can also last about four times longer than traditional bulbs. For those savings to your wallet alone they must be worth a try!

## Household Products

When shopping for household products a lot of us barely consider the impact that our choice of cleaning product will have on our homes, our health and the environment. Few people realise the damaging potential harm everyday products can cause to the environment. By using chemical cleaning agents sold in non-recyclable packaging we are filling our homes with unnecessary chemicals, which can be triggers to allergic reaction such as eczema, as well as severely affecting aquatic life. Chlorine bleach is especially damaging to aquatic life as it releases dioxins (highly toxic chemicals) in to our water systems. In general it is advisable to avoid ingredients that start with "chloro" in many household items such as disinfectants, kitchen roll and other common products.

There used to be very little choice when it came to 'green cleaning products' but in recent years significantly more brands have emerged.

When choosing something to clean my kitchen surfaces I always choose a brand that is sympathetic to my own values and reducing my impact on the environment. Shown here is a multi-purpose cleaning agent available from [www.greenpeople.co.uk](http://www.greenpeople.co.uk), a website that offers many forms of organic and 'green' products. There are various brands available which use natural cleaning agents rather than manufactured chemicals, and I would always opt for such a product for the health of both my family and the planet.

