

Tip at the Top!

Turning off an average light bulb for 1 hour a day, every day for a year could save 22 000 watts of energy - about the same used watching tv every evening for a year!

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Introduction

Hello and welcome to The Green Issue. We are a newsletter that aims to raise awareness of the environmental issues that face each one of us every day.

Last week we examined the environmental impact of our country's obsession with plastic bags, something which is once again been in the public eye this week as Marks and Spencers become the first major retailer to begin charging for carrier bags.

In focus, we look at the impact our cars have on the environment and the best possible ways to increase the fuel efficiency of our cars. Doing this not only benefits the environment as it decreases carbon emissions but it also decreases your own fuel bills!

Around the home we look at two things we regularly do every day: washing our hands and turning our lights on and off. We look at the ways these two actions affect the environment, and what exactly we can do to minimise the impact.

Firstly though, it's back to those bags!

Susan Bryant - Editor



Retail Company Begins Charging For Carrier Bags

In last week's The Green Issue we discussed the profound impact that our heavy reliance on plastic carrier bags is having on our environment. The past week this very issue has been at the forefront of the news as it is put to large retailers to stop the number of carrier bags their customers use.

Many major retailers have already put in to action various schemes to reduce the impact their customers use of carrier bags has. Tesco's has introduced a scheme where customers are given club card points when they reuse a carrier bags, Co-op has introduced a degradable carrier bag to replace the non-degradable old style bags. In a bold move, however, Marks and Spencers announced this week that they will begin to charge customers 5p per carrier bag used when packing their shopping.

This is a similar to scheme already employed in the Republic of Ireland where a plastic bag tax was introduced in 2002, with astonishing results. Since the introduction of this tax, plastic bag use has decreased by a staggering 90 percent; proving that such schemes really work.

Britain watched the introduction of this scheme closely and if the government are not willing to ban plastic bags outright (as is the case in Bangladesh) then this scheme seems like a superb way to reduce the amount of carrier bags we use; its effectiveness has clearly been proven in the Republic of Ireland.

The best way for our reliance on plastic bags to decrease is to raise awareness of the environmental damage they can cause and hope that consumers respond by making different choices. People, however, will often take the easy option, which is to use carrier bags at the checkout. If made to pay every time they do this it would increase the thought involved in the action. This would ultimately prompt them in to action. And there is no doubt that action is what is desperately needed in this dire situation.



How to Improve the Fuel Efficiency of Your Car

For many Britons climbing in the car is an integral part of their daily routine; most people doing this at least twice a day, on their way to and from work. In fact, of the average 6,815 miles Great British residents travel each year, four fifths of these miles are travelled in a car. That means, on average, each person in Britain travels 5452 miles per year in what is known to be a vehicle that has a directly detrimental affect on the environment. Alarmingly this figure is increasing year on year, rising by eleven percent during the 1990's alone.

As long as people continue to distrust public transport services and increased urbanisation leads to jobs being situated increasingly further away from people's homes, then our reliance on cars is only going to increase. If people see no viable alternatives and see their cars as a necessity, then what can be done about the impact this has on our environment.

Cars are, in their very nature, extremely polluting. The average new car creates, on average, 162 grams of CO₂ per kilometre travelled, and this is significantly less than older models. If we are to reduce our carbon footprint, yet still use our cars for the vast majority of our journeys, then the mantle falls to the car manufacturers to create a car that produces notably less CO₂, even than the newest models of cars available today.



Cars are significant contributors to the types of gases that are causing climate change; producing carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. In fact, road transportation accounts for over twenty percent of the UK's total emissions. It is for this reason that many car manufacturers have begun to explore ways to decrease the climate changing gases created by their vehicles.

The main reason cars are notorious for their bad carbon emissions is the fact that cars are extremely polluting due to the fuel that is used to run them. Cars are most often powered by petrol or diesel, both of which release harmful gases in to the environment. Cars can be more, or less, fuel efficient, and it is this measurement that is often used to decide how environmentally friendly a vehicle is. The way we drive our cars, however, also impacts the fuel efficiency of the car we choose to drive.

There are a few, simple, steps that we can all take to improve the fuel efficiency of our cars the benefits of which are twofold; firstly, you will notice a decrease in your fuel bills, and secondly you will decrease your carbon emissions.

The main way to increase the fuel efficiency of your car is to turn the engine off when you are stationary. It is argued that it is not always best practice to turn off your engine whenever you stop your car; if you are only stopped for a few moments then turning your engine off it not the best thing to do, as re-starting the engine could actually use more fuel than leaving it running for the few moments you are stationary. However, if you are stopped in your car for more than a few minutes it is always worth turning the engine off and saving fuel and reducing the amount of toxins released in to the atmosphere.

Driving smoothly, by accelerating at a slower pace and not breaking harshly, can lessen both fuel consumption and wear and tear; saving

you money in two respects. The main area where this is noticeable is motorway driving; if you keep driving at a steady pace rather than accelerating at the earliest opportunity you will lessen the need to brake. This steady driving on motorways also reduces hold ups and traffic jams.

Another sure fire way to increase the fuel efficiency of your car is to check your tyres are at the correct pressure (this can be done at most garages free of charge). This also decreases wear on the tyre as well as using less fuel, again saving you money!



Ensure that everything in your car is necessary for the journey you are making and you will also save money and decrease the emissions caused by your car. The lighter you travel the less fuel you use, which will decrease your carbon emissions and your fuel bill: taking off the roof rack, spare bags and car seats (if there are no children in them of course!) are all ways to lessen the load in your vehicle.

Surprisingly, it is more fuel efficient to drive with your air conditioning on rather than having your car windows open. This is because having your windows open increases the drag on your car, particularly when travelling at high speeds, this means that your car needs to use considerably more fuel to travel at the same pace than if the windows were closed. This is also the case for accessories on the outside of your car, such as roof and bicycle racks.

When driving, if you follow the steps outlined above, you will use less fuel therefore decreasing your carbon emissions and saving yourself money in the process. The best way, however, of decreasing your fuel bill is to not use your car. It is shocking that a quarter of all journeys in Britain are less than two miles long—surely walking, cycling, or using public transport would not only be greener and cheaper, it would also be a lot healthier. With reports out today that eight out of ten women are not doing enough exercise to remain healthy, surely ditching the car and walking instead would go a long way to solving this issue, as well as decreasing carbon emissions and slowing climate change.

So, where possible, lose the car and use your legs, both your heart and the environment will thank you!



Energy Saving - Lights (you just turn me on, then leave!)

In our house, where four of us live, we have nineteen separate light switches. This astounded me! Try counting the light switches in your own home and I'm sure you'll be amazed too.

This means that, at any one time, it is possible for there to be nineteen lights on within my house. This would happen if people didn't turn off the lights as they leave the room, something that I always have to remind them to do!

Turn off lights when they are not in use is something that is constantly drummed in to us, but what impact does this really have on the environment?

It makes sense that the longer lights are on the more energy is used and as the nights draw in and hours of daylight decrease this is an issue particularly relevant at the moment.

We are all aware of the benefits of changing regular light bulbs for their energy saving counterparts, but nothing saves as much energy as turning the lights off!

An average light bulb can use up to 60 watts an hour; if this one light bulb was turned off for just one hour a day this saves approximately 22,000 watts of electricity a year. This saves enough energy to watch television every evening for a year- just from turning off one light!

So, whether you are leaving the room for ten minutes or two hours make sure you use the switch and turn off that light!



Hygienic Hands

How many times, in one day, do you think you wash your hands? Knowing I was writing an article on this very subject I tried to count yesterday, but by lunchtime I had lost track. Washing hands is something I personally do at least once an hour: after going to the toilet, before preparing food, after preparing food, after changing a nappy... The list goes on, and on!

Hand in hand with all this washing is a vast amount of soap being flushed in to our water systems, the environmental consequences of which need to be considered.

As with all detergent based products it is necessary to consider the impact on aquatic life that is caused by the release of the soap suds in to the water. In a similar way to the by-products of washing-up liquid or washing powder can impact the levels of algae and other plants in our rivers and lakes, this is also true of the by-products of hand washes; something that is not as widely publicised and considered as the impact of other detergents. Yet as the same chemicals are released leading to an increase in algae it is still a major issue in the survival of our aquatic life.

The impact of this can be reduced by using a hand wash based on natural plant based ingredients and that are naturally scented.

Such products are becoming increasingly available at supermarkets and other retail outlets. The Body Shop do a marvellous range of plant based hand washes and Ecover's hand wash is scented with natural lavender, contains aloe vera, and is PH neutral therefore being ideal for sensitive skin. It is also not based on the petrochemical ingredients that are so damaging to our water systems.

It is not necessary to use harsh, chemical based hand washes in order to leave your hands clean. There are fantastic natural alternatives readily available, just give them a try!