



We Have Met the Enemy, and They Are Us

“We have met the enemy, and they are us” said Pogo in Walt Kelly’s cartoon strip about the turmoil of the Vietnam war. I think you could say the same about us, and our consumption of the world’s natural resources.

As a society we sit back and demand that the government ‘do something’ - legislate away the problem - solve the crisis - sign the treaty. Certainly governments - federal, state and local - have an essential role to play. Legislation can level the playing field by removing hidden subsidies that encourage bad practices such as clearcut logging, or prohibit the use of toxic materials. But in the end it’s money - our money and how we spend it - that drives the American economy.

Currently consumer spending is the majority of the economy - rather than in the past when it was investment and industry. A collapse in consumer spending - or a drop in consumer confidence - would have devastating consequences for our whole society, and probably a ripple effect around the world. But this also gives us power. The power to spend where we choose, to reward good companies and punish the bad.

The Australian government has decided to ban incandescent light bulbs. In the future you’ll only be able to purchase compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), fluorescent bulbs and LED lights. The law cost almost nothing to enact and will save huge amounts of carbon dioxide (4 million tonnes by 2010 when the ban is in full effect) and reduce the demand for fossil-fuel powered generating plants. How likely is it that our government would pass such a law here in the USA?

But as an individual you have that power right now - you don’t need to wait for the government - go out and purchase CFL bulbs for yourself. You don’t need to replace every bulb in your house since most CFLs have an effective light output

equivalent only to a 70 watt conventional bulb. I replaced all but two of my bulbs (for reading lamps) with CFLs and have calculated that I save about \$20 per month in winter, and have only replaced one bulb in seven years due to failure.

I bought my bulbs in Seattle for 99 cents each when one of the utilities was having a promotion. Contact your local supplier of bulbs and encourage them to carry a wider selection, and offer better prices. Contact OPALCO and ask them to have promotions on energy efficient lighting.

If where you work uses conventional strip lights encourage the owner to replace them with thinner bulbs (T5’s are 5/8ths inch diameter rather than 1 inch). Combined with electronic (rather than magnetic) ballasts these bulbs are more energy efficient and give out a more natural color light - look for a Color Rendering Index (CRI) in the 90’s.

Now that you have replaced your bulbs why not think about purchasing them for a family member or friend? Encourage your neighbors, or neighborhood association to do the same. Community associations could pool their resources and buy bulbs in bulk (online) or on a member’s next visit to the mainland. Donate some to low-income families (who need ways to save money the most) and encourage their use in your workplace in desk and wall lamps.

We rightly complain about how energy companies generate their power - coal and fossil fuels being the worst, but even hydro-electric has negative consequences for the environment. So who is it who uses this power? Us! Residential power use

comprises about half the power used in the USA, and the amount of residential electricity consumed over the last 20 years has increased by about 16% despite energy efficiency gains in home appliances.

It's within the power of each of us to reduce our energy 'footprint' and influence that of our friends and neighbors. Turn down the thermostat on the hot water tank, open a window instead of turning on the fan or HVAC. Install a low flow shower head - thus saving water and energy. Wait until the energy-efficient dishwasher is full before using it and let the dishes air dry (overnight) instead of using the drying cycle. Turn off lights when not needed.

If you're worried about how much gasoline you use - and carbon dioxide you generate - here's a simple way to halve the fuel consumption of your car while waiting for the feds to improve the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. Cut your trips in half. Don't go to town as often. Combine journeys. Grocery shop only once a week. Maybe you could car pool with a friend or neighbor sometimes. Wait until you are next in town to deposit that check. If you're a multi-car family have one small, frugal vehicle (a Toyota Yaris at 40 MPG for example) that you use whenever possible, rather than the less efficient minivan or SUV that you use for family trips.

Most of the small steps we can take to reduce our energy and water demand are very simple and are more a case of changing our habits than making huge lifestyle changes. Oftentimes the only impediment to changing is our perceived loss of freedom of choice. Personally I'd rather be making these choices now, rather than waiting until they are taken away from us when we reach a crisis point.