

Green Tip Archives 2010

12-20-10: Before You Leave for the Holiday

Since we won't be here next week, we have a great opportunity to *reduce* our electricity usage! Before you leave for the break, here are some things that you can do to help keep things green while you're out:

- Turn off your computer (it probably needs a good winter nap anyway)
- Flip the switch off – for regular office lights and task lighting
- Unplug power strips and cords for coffee makers, microwaves, printers, copiers, etc. Even when turned off, these devices will still pull electricity if plugged in; this is known as vampire power or phantom loads
- Adjust thermostats a few degrees lower (if possible)
- Close window blinds – the light/heat from the sun will cause the A/C to kick in.

Other suggestions for conservation/sustainability:

- Make sure there are no drippy faucets in the break rooms/bathrooms
- If you are tidying up your office:
 - Recycle paper or keep it for use as scratch paper
 - Send unwanted items to Surplus or try the "trash to treasure" concept with your coworkers before throwing items away. Sharing is caring!

11-29-10: Recycle Right and more

You should start to see "Recycle Right" guides posted in areas around the complex. If you want to be proactive and put your own signs in place, check out the [Facilities Services website](#) for downloadable signs.

In other news, reality TV might be coming back to Austin! And not with MTV this time. Check out the [KUT News site](#). Participation information included as well.

For ongoing local green events such as Sierra Club, group bike rides, farmers markets, and much more, go to [Austin EcoNetwork](#).

11-08-10: Being Sustainable Includes Being Healthy

Part of being sustainable is about being healthy, whether it's the food you eat or the products we use. [Laurie Lentz](#) has shared some really great resource websites that focus on healthy, sustainable living. Check out the [healthystuff](#) web site, which researches toxic chemicals in everyday products and a [WebMd site](#) takes you through a virtual home and provides helpful tips on "healthy" rooms.

11-01-10: Green Advertising

Some "green" advertising can be a little skewed. I would like to share an article that gives insight on the tag lines "natural" or "approved" versus environmentally friendly

products to further aid in the purchasing decisions we make: [Natural ingredients and the environment](#). When in doubt, empower yourself with knowledge!

10-11-10: Recycling Survey

Want to make a difference on campus? Have a green impact? Please take a [recycling survey](#) on where bins should be placed. If you have any further questions about the survey or what it will be used for please contact Mark McKim at markilous07@gmail.com.

10-04-10: Waste Decomposition Rate

Ever wonder how long an item takes to decompose or “break down”? Here are some examples:

- Orange or banana peel: 2-5 weeks
- Cigarette filter: 1-5 years
- Styrofoam cup: 50 years
- Plastic beverage bottles: 450 years

To see the rest of the items listed, check out the [Waste Decomposition Rate](#) article. This demonstrates why it is important to know the impact of products you are purchasing and what can be recycled; otherwise they are probably heading to a landfill to stay for a very *long* time.

09-14-10: Cooling with Fans

Another tip for reducing electricity and saving \$\$\$\$ is to use **fans**. Whether installing ceiling fans or plugging in a portable fan, you use ~98% less electricity than that used by central A/C units and save up to \$1,000 per year! [Read the full tip online](#).

09-07-10: Lime Plaster

If you have a home rendering project happening soon and would like to reduce the associated environmental impact, consider a genuine lime plaster - it's a natural exterior/interior finish that sequesters carbon dioxide! Read more at [Lime plaster is green](#).

08-30-10: Cool Roofs

Bryan Sloane shared an article on cool roofs that discusses the environmental and economical benefits of painting roofs and pavements white. [Check it out](#).

08-23-10: Austin's Climate Protection Program

Visit the website for [City of Austin's Austin Climate Protection Program](#)! Here you can check out their version of carbon footprint calculator and join the Austin Climate Community.

08-16-10: Cold Water Washing

Looking for another way to keep your electricity bills low? Wash your laundry in cold water! According to the EPA, approximately **90%** of the total energy consumed by a standard top-load washing machine goes to heating the water. Pressing the "Cold/Cold" button on your washing machine just 80% of the time will save you between \$60 and \$100 per month, depending on the cost of energy in your area. Plus, you'll be saving **72 pounds** of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. [Read the article on this tip.](#)

07-26-10: Recycled Paper Leis

Friday the 13th is coming up and Susan Patino found a great site on making your own recycled paper leis, for those of us who participate in the Hawaiian t-shirt theme that day. So before you throw any junk mail or those "not for construction" plans in the bin, check out these [instructions](#) on how to be hula, be green.

07-19-10: Local Recyclers

Having trouble finding [local recyclers](#) for all the odd and ends around your house? Please don't throw things away so quickly! Check the [1-800-Recycling.com](#) Web site by your zip code to see all the great places Austin (and beyond) has to keep our landfills low. This suggestion was contributed by [Sally Hoffman](#) – keep up the good work!

06-28-10: Think Globally, Act Locally

Today I want to share two videos that highlight the "Think Globally, Act Locally" mentality and efforts. One is from [News 8](#) regarding a possible City of Austin study of the benefits of vegetated rooftops and the other is from the [Story of Stuff Project](#).

06-21-10: Vehicle Idling

I want to highlight a problem that is still occurring on and off campus with our very own workforce: IDLING. An [Energy Savings Program](#) for our Fleet has been outlined (#4 under Best Practices for Driving). For reference, Hamilton County Environmental Services provides an interesting [FAQ on Idling](#). By this model, the employee who sits in their idling car everyday during their 30 minute lunch uses approximately 1/10 gallon of gas each time, equal to ~26 gallons/year, ~500 lbs/year of CO₂ released into the air, and (depending on gas prices) ~\$70/year, not to mention the costly damage to the car's engine. Please take the few seconds to turn off your engine and restart it when you are ready to drive. Remember, you get 0 mpg when idling.

06-14-10: UT's Bloomhouse

Aziz Hussaini shared information on the U.S. Department of Energy's [Solar Decathlon](#) in which UT competed in 2007. The UT team placed 2nd in engineering and 10th overall – not too shabby! Check out UT's winning [Bloomhouse!](#)

06-07-10: Shipping Containers

Check out this article on [reuse](#), [Amazing homes and offices built from shipping containers](#). While a number of resourceful people have converted shipping containers to

makeshift shelters at the margin of society for years, architects and green designers are also increasingly turning to the strong, cheap boxes as building blocks. Shipping containers can be readily modified with a range of creature comforts and can be connected and stacked to create modular, efficient spaces for a fraction of the cost, labor and resources of more conventional materials.

06-01-10: Reclaimed Building Materials

Frauke Bartels shared this resource on reclaimed building materials, [**Planet Reuse**](#). The site also highlights projects that have benefited from this site.

05-22-10: Contribute to Local Recycling List

The PMCS Green Team would like to add a collaborative list on the PMCS Sustainability webpage about local recycling! So please e-mail [Lauren Constant](#) with names and locations of places that recycle and which materials they recycle. Suggestions will be compiled and placed under the Resource tab of the website.

05-17-10: Recycle and Reuse Batteries

Update on battery recycling and reusing: If you would like your own battery recycling bin for your area/shop, please notify [Lauren Constant](#) and she will provide one. Lauren and Julie Heiland will visit the shops on Thursday to promote this recycling initiative. When it comes to reusing, Sally Hoffman on the 2nd Floor of FC1 can now charge up any AA or AAA rechargeable batteries! Simply label them with your name and phone number.

05-10-10: Mass Consumption

See and read about a creative representation, sent by Neil Crump, of what can occur when we become mass consumers instead of sustainers. A quote from Chris Jordan's *Intolerable Beauty: Portraits of American Mass Consumption*: "The pervasiveness of our consumerism holds a seductive kind of mob mentality. Collectively we are committing a vast and unsustainable act of taking, but we each are anonymous and no one is in charge or accountable for the consequences. I fear that in this process we are doing irreparable harm to our planet and to our individual spirits." See Chris Jordan's works on [his Web site](#).

05-03-10: Green Value of Metal

Check out "The Hole Story" that Troy Johnson shared about [The Green Value of Metal](#), including a [Green Case Study](#) in Oakland, CA.

04-26-10: City of Austin Composting Pilot

Want some more green incentives? Check out what the City of Austin is doing for those interested in starting their own compost by reading the *Austin American-Statesman* article, "[City starts composting pilot program](#)," or visiting the [City of Austin Web site](#).

04-19-10: Carbon Cap and Trade

Green Living Tips featured an article about the carbon cap and trade system that tries to simplify a commonly misunderstood concept which has the potential for a variety of economic consequences. Balancing our environmental issues with industry is still a difficult situation that has not found a foolproof resolution as of yet. Read the [article online](#).

04-12-10: Green University

Ever wonder which U.S. university is considered the most “green”? Watch [this video](#) for the answer and examples of how they continue along the path toward sustainability.

04-05-10: Competitive Energy Reduction Project

Results are in from the Competitive Energy Reduction (CER) Project created by [The Austin Chapter of Scientists and Engineers for America](#). The project evaluated two buildings on campus--SEA and CPE--to compare patterns of energy use in a new building versus an old one. Visit the [CER Project site](#) to see the final data and project conclusions.

03-29-10: Bottled Water

[The Story of Bottled Water video](#) looks at how we can reduce pollution and spending simultaneously by avoiding the purchase of bottled water.

03-22-10: Building with Rice Straw

A company called Oryzatech reuses agricultural waste rice straw to produce building materials that are highly insulating and carbon-sequestering. [Check it out!](#)

03-15-10: Natural Food

Big Green Purse has an interesting blog article on [how to differentiate real natural food](#) from food with packaging that claims being natural by looking for the Natural Products Association certification seal.

03-08-10: E-Waste

There are always two sides of a story, even when companies have the best of intentions to be sustainable and user-friendly. One flip-side of the rise in new, green products can be “e-waste.” Regan Terrier of the Cabinet Shop shared an article titled “Can greener gadgets save us from e-waste?” It is something to take into consideration before investing in new technologies. If a product uses more resources and causes more pollution than the product it is replacing, maybe it’s not as “green” as advertised. For more on the topic, check out the [Scientific American article](#).

03-01-10: Green Inventions

Brian Smith found a *60 Minutes* [video clip of the Bloom Box](#), a small version of a power plant that can be placed in a backyard to supply home energy needs. The [Leech Plug](#) disconnects the device after it has been fully charged to reduce phantom loads.

Stacy Shook found two water-powered shower heads that have LED lights in them—one from [Gadget Grid](#) and another from [Sylvania](#).

And Bryan Sloane found “greenovations” such as the EcoCradle for material shipments and waterless recycling on the [Popular Science magazine Web site](#).

02-22-10: LEED Renovations

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) was created by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) as a means to rate buildings (including residential) on the sustainability of their design and operation. Although a renovation project may not qualify for LEED certification, it’s possible to utilize some LEED standards and styles to make the most of the project, whether at work or home. While some sustainable products/methods suggested can be more costly than conventional ones, they will provide a better return on investment. For more information on LEED, visit the [Green Building Council Web site](#).

02-15-10: Greenvelopes and CFLs

If you use campus mail, you should start seeing [greenvelopes](#) being circulated. Send any feedback about the reusable, eco-friendly envelopes to [Richard Beto](#), director of University Services.

Sally Hoffman, our battery and ink cartridge recycler, found out that Home Depot can recycle your expired CFL light bulbs. Check out details on their [eco-option site](#).

02-08-10: Eco2Go and More

Today is the launch of a new reusable takeout container program by Division of Housing & Food Services called [Eco2Go](#)! If you have any questions, contact [Meagan Jones](#), the DHFS Environmental Specialist.

The [Campus Environmental Center](#) has revamped their website. Also new for CEC are plans to start a garden near campus, so if you are interested in participating in designing/maintenance, e-mail gardening@utenvironment.org.

RLM's Green Team will reuse/recycle Styrofoam, peanuts, or bubble wrap for you! Their designated bin is by the entrance to RLM library at Speedway and Dean Keeton.

01-25-10: Carpenter Shop Reuses for Orange Santa

The [2nd Sustainability Newsletter](#) features the Carpenter Shop's volunteer effort to create toys for Orange Santa using scrap wood and leftover paint from projects. This article can also be found at our [website](#).

01-18-10: Freecycle™ Network

A global organization called the Freecycle™ Network "performs many wonderful functions like building bonds and community, keeping material items from the landfills, and redeeming the clutter than consumes us by moving it forward to a new, productive life." Basically, it's like Trash-to-Treasure on a larger scale. For more general information, go to the [Freecycle™ Web site](#), or to sign up locally for free, visit the [Web site of the Austin chapter](#).

01-11-10: Tap Water vs. Bottled Water

Tastes similar, yet the environmental, financial, and health effects can be drastically different. Which will you choose?

- Almost half of bottled water sold in the U.S. is actually filtered tap water. Why pay a huge markup for what you can get at home?
- Approximately 1.5 million barrels of oil in the U.S. alone are used to make water bottles from polyethylene terephthalate (can become toxic under certain storage temperatures and storage duration)--86% of which are land-filled or incinerated.

To learn more, check out these [ecomii](#) and [treehugger](#) Web sites.

01-04-2010: Perceived Obsolescence

Read this [Green Living Tips article](#) about perceived obsolescence—that is, continuously buying "new and improved" while discarding useful items into landfills: Here is how Wikipedia defines obsolescence: "Obsolescence is the state of being which occurs when an object, service or practice is no longer wanted even though it may still be in good working order. Obsolescence frequently occurs because a replacement has become available that is superior in one or more aspects."

Recycle, sell or donate (for reuse) any items you have replaced with an upgraded version. Or just save the dollars and reduce your purchases.