

Aging Lifestyles: Let's go green as we go gray

by Joe_Volz

Older Americans go everywhere by plane, car, train or bus. Wherever we go, we use power made from coal, oil and gas that takes centuries to develop. The emissions generate carbon dioxide that, in turn, goes into the air we breathe.

The gases then form what's called the "greenhouse effect" that overheats our environment. If the current pace of using fossil fuels continues, many scientists warn, we'll be in store for unwanted consequences: oceans rising, coastal cities worldwide destroyed and the extinction of many plants and animals.

It's not a pretty thought.

And it could happen much quicker than we think, as former Vice President Al Gore's environmental film, "An Inconvenient Truth," warns us. The experts don't agree, but some think it could be as soon as 2030.

We older folks are in a good position to become environmentalists. Generally speaking, older people aren't rushing quite as much as their adult children and thus have more time to tackle such problems as pollution and greenhouse gases.

We also travel a lot. And there's much we can do to make our environment healthier as we travel.

The first step is to learn as much as possible about the problem and what we are doing to our natural resources. Webster's Dictionary defines an environmentalist "as someone working to solve problems such as air and water pollution and the exhaustion of our natural resources such as our forests." Keep in mind that the average American generates about 15,000 pounds of carbon dioxide every year from personal transportation, home energy use and from the energy used to produce all of the products and services consumed.

Here are some suggestions of what you can do.

AT HOME

Replace regular incandescent light bulbs with a compact fluorescent light bulb. CFLs use 60 percent less energy than a regular bulb. If every U.S. family switched, we'd reduce carbon dioxide by more than 90 billion

pounds.

Set your thermostat down 2 degrees in winter and up 2 degrees in summer. This would save about 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide a year.

A relatively painless thing to do is to travel in environmentally friendly ways. For a quick shopping trip, walk or bike whenever possible - these are energy-neutral and therefore do not harm the environment.

When remodeling or buying a new condo or home, ask whether the builder uses environmentally sound materials. Use bamboo for furnishings, for example, since this plant grows quickly. We can find ways to use alternative sources of energy too. Install a solar panel to capture the sun's energy for heating.

WHILE TRAVELING

With some forethought, we can become "ecotourists," the term applied to travelers who are environmentalists.

Travelers can buy "offsets" from airlines or travel agencies for varying amounts from \$10 on up. In essence, these "green tags" or "green travel" passes are in exchange for the number of miles we travel. The money raised goes partly toward replacing the energy used, such as by investing in "green" companies dedicated to researching alternative energy sources.

When renting an automobile while on vacation or business, ask managers if they have energy-efficient cars. Many auto agencies do.

Look for hotels that are working to contain environmental damage caused by the chemical agents in cleaning supplies. Many hotels already ask visitors to help by reusing towels and linens during their stay.

Also look for hotels that make their interest obvious in written materials and practices.

BECOMING ADVOCATES

An important role all of us can play is to become an advocate of things green. We do this every time we talk about squandering the world's resources.

Ask everyone you know to adopt at least one way of being eco-friendly. Grandchildren can be your secret weapon. Enlist them in your campaign.

Junior high and high school students often respond positively and will put into place such simple activities as turning off lights when they leave a room. Urge them to save energy by turning off their electronic gadgets and computers whenever they stop using them.

For more information contact Sustainable Travel International at 2060 Floral Dr., Boulder, CO. 80304; 720-273-2975.

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