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Green and Greener - Be green and save some green

By Dave Rochlin and Katy Foreman

Dave: Would you make few easy lifestyle changes in 2009 if we offered you \$500?

There's an old saying that "a New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other." So in lieu of resolutions, we're kicking off the new year and our new monthly feature with a more direct approach: Cash.

Okay, we aren't actually sending out checks. The money comes from savings off your 2009 gasoline and PG&E bills. But a dollar saved is a dollar earned, right?

PG&E reports that a typical residential customer uses 540 kWh and 45 gas therms each month, which adds up to \$1700/year. The average Lamorinda home is anything but typical, and most of us probably spend \$3000 or more on gas and electric each year. Add to that the fifteen hundred gallons of gas most of us will buy next year, which will cost another \$4,000. That's \$7,000 we'll each spend on energy in 2009.

Katy: Hey! Speak for yourself. My bill is about a third of that. And, let me interject that aside from saving money, you're helping fight global warming. A \$500 reduction in energy use eliminates roughly three tons of carbon (CO2) emissions. CO2 contributes to climate change, and the average American produces close to twenty tons per year, so a three-ton personal reduction can make a big difference in helping the planet.

Dave: Exactly! So my personal favorite starts at the washing machine. Procter & Gamble, the folks who make Tide laundry detergent, reported that if they could get everybody in the U.S. to wash clothes in full loads in cold water, it would reduce total U.S. energy consumption by over 3%. Your share would save you as much as \$100 per year.

Katy: Hot water is typically at the top of the list in home energy consumption. Surprisingly, almost all of the energy used in washing clothes comes from heating the water. Of course, using a clothes line instead of the dryer can save you another \$75/year...

Dave: Whoa, let's not go back to the 1930s! Plus my wife thinks I treat the entire house as a clothes line.

Katy: That's hardly the 1930s, drama king. I'm just saying; open a window now and then instead of using the AC. And when it's hot, hang some jeans or towels over the railing. Use the weather to your advantage. Plus, my jeans last like five times longer.

Dave: Fine, fine. What about compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs)?

Katy: Big savings there...but you have to invest a little to get it. Putting in a dozen CFLs can reduce your electricity consumption by 5%. That's good for another \$100/year. If you replace all of your bulbs, you could save as much as \$300. Get in the habit of turning them off when you leave a room, and you'll save even more!

Dave: Well even though it is costing me money, we've just been replacing with CFL's as the old ones burn out. I just can't bring myself to change a lightbulb that is still working....frankly, even the burnt out ones don't get changed right away.

Katy: At a minimum you should replace the ones that get the most use, like your porch light and anything in the kitchen. The energy savings are well worth it.

Dave: Now about gasoline. Even with lower gas prices, there is no joy paying at the pump. Keeping your tires inflated can save you 40 gallons a year. And

weight matters as well. If you pull the sporting goods, snow chains, assorted beach chairs, and books out of your car, that could save another 25 gallons. So get that junk out of your trunk! The two together put another \$200 in your pocket.

Katy: I might also point out that a lot of us are near Bart. But when you need to drive, the real cost savings comes from slowing down. Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 55 mph. If you do a lot of freeway driving, slowing from 75 to 65 will save at least 100 gallons a year, and an additional ton of CO2. A drive from here to Tahoe would take 20 minutes longer at most.

Dave: I'm pretty sure that the 55 MPH speed limit is why neither Gerald Ford nor Jimmy Carter got more than one term. How about just going smoother on starts and stops?

Katy: Your grasp of presidential politics is truly profound. Smoother starts and stops can definitely help. Estimates vary wildly, but you'll use at least 50 less gallons per year that way. That's another \$150.

Dave: Or if you have a teenager in your house, it could be worth as much as \$50,000.

Katy: I'll take your word for it on that one. Well, let's sum it up. How to save over \$500 in 2009:

Use cold water for your laundry (\$75)

- Start replacing conventional lightbulbs with CFLS (\$100)
- Keep your tires inflated and your car free of junk (\$200)
- Stop and start smoothly when you drive (\$150)

This is a good start. Next time we can talk about how to use part of that \$500 savings to go from a smaller footprint to carbon neutral.

Dave: That will be my resolution!



Katy Foreman is a committed environmentalist who lives in Lafayette, and Dave Rochlin is a lazy environmentalist who lives in Moraga. Together they operate ClimatePath, a website helping individuals and businesses reduce their carbon footprints by offsetting and conserving in the ways that are right for them. ClimatePath is on the web at www.climatepath.org

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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