



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published December 9th, 2009

Dreaming of a Green Christmas

By Dave Rochlin and Katy Foreman

Well, with Katy on new baby duty, I'm writing this month's holiday-themed column solo.

Most of you know that this is the time of year when consumption hits its peak. The holiday shopping season accounts for as much as 40 percent of annual sales and profits for some retailers, and if you aren't one of the 7 percent of Americans who completed their holiday shopping by Black Friday, you probably still have a whole lot of spending left to do.

So even though your mailbox is filling up with charitable appeals, and thousands of diplomats are convening in Copenhagen this month to try and solve global warming, I'm not going to try and convince you not to shop. I mean hey...Christmas (and Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Festivus) only comes once a year. But here are a few thoughts and ideas to keep it green(er) this year, from a reformed holiday spendthrift.

Holiday Lights

Over the last decade, I have gradually assembled a fabulous collection of prancing reindeer, waving Santas, glowing snowmen, and other outdoor display lights. I've gotten a bit lazy about putting them up in the last few years...so instead, we now pay a short night time visit to some of the more over-the-top displays that go up every year at the end of Lynwood Drive (in Moraga), and near the country club in Orinda...their 'juice', my joy! I also recall that during the Enron-induced power crisis in 2000, a lot of us did just fine without the lights.

But if you are lighting up (...and of course you are), keep in mind that a typical 60 watt (100 mini-light) string which is left on 24 hours/day for the month of December uses a total of 44 kwh. This equates to \$5.00 in electricity and 20 lbs of CO2 per string. So use a timer or pull the plug before bed, and cut your power usage by 2/3. If you do your part, I'll even offset the remaining carbon (for up to 6 strings) on your behalf -- and support a carbon project that benefits a few of the two billion people that have no electricity at all. Just email me at "info@climatepath.org" with "carbon neutral lights" as the subject header, and let me know how many strings you've got.

Lastly, if you're shopping for new lights, make the switch to LED. These lights consume almost no electricity at all, saving money and carbon.

Gag Gifts

For years, I had a gag gift war going with a few relatives. I estimate that as much as 50% my shopping time was spent locating and purchasing the 'ideal gag gift' that was good for a 30 second chuckle. I also received many similar gifts in retaliation, which were later tossed out or dumped in the back of a closet. These have included everything from singing fish and dancing hamsters to an Easter Island statue inspired tissue box that dispenses Kleenex through its nose.

It takes a tremendous amount of resources to mold and paint plastic, package it, add batteries, and ship the whole thing to the US from China. Some gifts are gifts, but others are just 'stuff'. This year, why not put in more time on thoughtful gifts, and skip the stuff?

Travel

If we are "addicted" to oil, then I guess air travel would need to be classified as heroin: Extremely harmful, and yet almost impossible to quit. In terms of personal climate impact, flying is one of the worst things you can do: Without flying, the average person's carbon footprint in the US is 16 tons. But for the 25% of American who fly (pretty much everyone in Lamorinda), the average footprint is 6 tons higher. And if you are one of the roughly 6 Million 'frequent fliers' in The US, the typical footprint is 40 tons - almost triple the average. Yikes!

Flying is especially harmful because the emissions are released much further up in the atmosphere. Even if you aren't flying somewhere for the holidays, you will probably be driving...a lot. Once again, I'm not going to try and convince you not to travel. But do practice smoother driving and inflate your tires properly to bump up your mileage. Going 65 mph on your way to Tahoe gets you stuck putting on chains at Applegate a whopping 15 minutes later than by going 75.

As always, you should also consider offsetting your remaining emissions. You can consider it the moral and practical equivalent of Methadone -- a safe way to gradually withdraw from your oil addiction, rather than quitting cold turkey. Or better yet, just think of it as a tax deductible way to help others while reducing the impact of your good cheer.

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. Individuals and businesses can measure and then reduce their carbon footprints through tax deductible donations that support carbon reduction activities, renewable energy project, and forestry initiatives around the world at www.climatepath.org

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA