

## Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle: Beyond the Basics

The well known motto “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” provides an accessible reminder that can help get us started with a personal conservation plan. To begin, we must assess our own habits for energy consumption, product purchasing and rubbish recycling. It is also important to make a commitment to continuously educate ourselves regarding our personal responsibilities.

Public education has done a good job of changing our culture’s view of environmental responsibility in many respects. For example, legislation discourages littering with hefty fines and now prevents the use of burn barrels. The common practice of recycling bottles and cans conserves both natural resources and energy. It is becoming fashionable to recycle everything from clothing to furniture and building supplies, to use products made from renewable resources, and to replace inefficient vehicles and appliances. But for many of us, it is sometimes difficult to know how to move beyond those basics.

One area we can focus on reducing is household energy consumption. There are a number of items that are simple and inexpensive to implement that can make a big difference in energy loss. The following is a list of considerations for people interested in moving beyond sorting recyclables:

- Insulation- Bring your home up to current energy code standards by insulating attic, walls, basement, hot water tank and piping.
- Reducing drafts- Seal around drafty doors, windows and other penetrations with caulking and replace damaged weather stripping. If weather stripping or caulk is not enough to stop the energy loss, consider replacing doors and windows with new high performance, energy star products.
- New Appliances- Replace inefficient appliances with energy star appliances.
- Heating/cooling equipment- Tune up or replace old equipment for maximum efficiency.
- Lighting- Utilize energy efficient lighting products
- General conservation- Don’t waste water, electricity or heat by running water, leaving lights on or leaving windows and doors open unnecessarily.



### **Alternative Energy Options**

Another option for reducing energy demands and costs is alternative energy (AE). There are many affordable AE products that provide a good return on your investment while contributing to environmental responsibility. Some of the best AE options include:

- Solar attic fans- significantly reduce home cooling costs
- Solar hot water heaters- reduce overall hot water heating costs by 60-65% in the Northeast
- Solar space heating- supplement space heating costs when utilized separately or in conjunction with solar hot water heaters
- Geothermal heat pumps- heats and cools efficiently using geothermal energy
- Wood Boilers- provide ample space and water heating capability with minimal affects on the environment with newer high efficiency gasification units

### **Incentives**

Almost every AE item mentioned qualifies for some form of tax credit. For a helpful list of federal and state tax incentive, visit [www.dsireusa.org](http://www.dsireusa.org).

### **Long-Term Options**

After working through conservation methods and reducing overall energy consumption, it is time to consider Personal Energy Production. The trend in green home building is toward sustainable self-supporting homesteads or “pods.” Not only will these homesteads be energy efficient, they will be off-grid, and provide all the energy necessary through personal energy production. They will also embrace organic farming for food production. The implementation of solar photovoltaic, wind, and micro-hydro technologies for personal energy production is the biggest step toward self-sufficiency. Beyond controlling spiraling energy costs and our global dependency on fossil fuels, the ability to produce your own energy, brings with it a measure of personal security, freedom, and harmony with the environment. For those willing to take this leap, there are currently generous tax credits and rebates available to help off-set the costs of such a project.

### **Pass It On**

The final stage of our stewardship is to pass on what we have learned and implemented. The student becomes the mentor. Becoming an example and advocate for environmental responsibility in your community will truly help make our planet a better place to live.

