Why Do We Need To Go Green?

by Michael A. Russell

Recently there has been a sharper focus on the technologies and industries we support with our habits and lifestyles and the impact they have on not only us but also the environment at large.

The WWF Living Planet Report 2006 paints a very grim future for our children and us. At present we are using resources at a rate faster than they can be replenished and it appears as if our usage is steadily on the rise.

The air we breathe is no longer clean; coral reefs are slowly being eradicated by warmer ocean temperatures; various terrestrial, marine and freshwater animal species, some vital to our survival, face extinction; some of our freshwater supply contains poisons like mercury and arsenic and large swathes of land are being made barren by industry.

We have moved beyond sustainability into "overshoot" – using far more resources than the planet can sustain and that can be replenished.

Some frightening environmental developments which have manifested in two of the world's most industrialized nations include:

- In the Unites States 18 000 people die from lung diseases caused by polluted air every year and the frequency of asthma attacks, particularly among young children, has increased significantly.
- All fish in 19 states of the USA are unsafe to eat and one in every 6 American women has dangerously high levels in the womb as a result of increased mercury in the water. 630 000 children are also born each year with a host of debilitating and sometimes life threatening diseases.
- In China, another industrial powerhouse, imports of freshwater fish from the mainland were halted for 18 days after Malachite Green, a banned fungicide with possible links to cancer, was found in samples of fish from local markets.
- In February 2007 Chinese health officials had to recall six brands of lipstick from two Shantou based companies after they were found to contain Sudan Red, an industrial dye known to cause cancer. This is the same dye used to color petrol and floor polish.
- 4 out of every 5 mainland grown strawberries, green vegetables and tangerines bought in Hong Kong based markets contained residues from banned pesticides such as DDT.

The examples above are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg – the problem is far greater and more widely spread than just these examples.

At this juncture the question it is necessary to ask ourselves is whether this is the world we want to live in and leave to our children? What do you value more – human life or your current habits?

A change is not wanted, but needed.

There are also investment opportunities to be had for the investor with the trained eye. Our local bourse currently boasts a few companies involved in “green” technologies whose share prices have seen an increase in value recently. Eventually more and more investors will subscribe to some greener agenda and it is very possible that they would expect some form of environmental responsibility from the companies whose shares they hold or are contemplating buying.

It may even be that adopting environmentally friendly technologies may save companies and industries more money than can be imagined. Computers in the United States currently consume $1 billion of electricity a year – when they’re not being used. Switching to a cheaper, greener option would not only be friendlier to the environment, it will save various companies a substantial chunk on their electricity bill. For those of you don’t own a business it’s simple – you can increase profits by minimizing overheads.

How can you make you business or office green and more “fuel” efficient?

- Improve indoor quality of life.
    - ✓ Allow worker access to outside views
    - ✓ Open windows for air circulation
    - ✓ As far possible work by natural light

- Save water
    - ✓ Use low flow taps with automatic shutoffs in kitchens and bathrooms
    - ✓ Install toilets that allow for a low volume flush

- Build Green (if possible)
    - ✓ Avoid using carcinogenic or otherwise environmentally unfriendly materials
    - ✓ Buy used furniture or fixtures made from recycled materials

- Conserve energy
    - ✓ Allow individuals to control the light and temperatures in their areas.
    - ✓ Laptops use far power than desktop PC’s.
    - ✓ Install motion-sensing switches to turn off lights when no-one is present in an area.

- Pick a sustainable site (where possible)
    - ✓ Locate buildings where they will have the least environmental impact
    - ✓ Choose sites closer to public transport within walking distances of services.

No gasoline, no batteries – how?

There are seven renewable sources of energy which exist.

1. Bio-fuels – alternative, less harmful fuels derived from natural resources. A booming future economic and investment opportunity with a projected worth of $80.9bn by 2016.
2. Wind power – predictions for growth in this sector are projected at $60.8bn by 2016.
3. Solar power – the solar power market (solar wafers, photovoltaic modules, system components and installation) is estimated to be worth $69.3bn by 2016.
4. Fuel cell – to replace conventional batteries. Estimated market value $15.6bn by 2016.
5. Wave and Tidal energy – the UK government has recently expressed interest in building a 14bn pound tidal barrage across the Severn which could generate 5% of the UK's electricity from a renewable source.
6. Biomass, waste gases and recycling – some companies are already generating power from waste and waste gases.
7. Nuclear power (responsibly used) – this last option is distasteful to many, particularly considering the effects of a meltdown, but nuclear power is another short term answer in the search for carbon-free energy sources. Uranium prices are rising steadily.

It may require massive lifestyle changes and sacrifices from us all but is a cleaner, greener planet fit for human habitation not a goal to strive for?

Sources:

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