


Don't Just Blindly Follow All 'Green' Trends -- Do Your Research First

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Don't Just Blindly Follow All 'Green' Trends -- Do Your Research First

By Michael Bass

UCF Forum columnist

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Nowadays it is politically correct to be “green” – to say and do things that seem to minimize one’s impact on the environment and to preach to others to do the same.

But I am tired of people who portray themselves as somehow better environmentally than others just because they follow the latest trend without thinking it through. I want to point out glaring inconsistencies about such people and to describe some simple steps anyone can take to really reduce his or her impact on the environment.

For example, just changing out the old tungsten filament bulbs in one’s home for high-efficiency compact fluorescent or light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs makes a major impact on the environment by reducing your demand for energy. This, by the way, has been forced on us because by federal law after Jan. 1, 2014, no 40- and 60-watt tungsten filament bulbs, the most popular, can be manufactured in the United States. You can buy incandescent light bulbs but only for special purposes and they are expensive.

Now, however, consider the impact of compact fluorescent lamps. They all contain mercury. They all have a warning to dispose of them correctly but it’s likely that very few consumers do much more than put the lamps in the trash when they fail. So, being green in one way – using less energy – is not so green in two other ways: Handling mercury to make the compact fluorescent bulbs and disposing of them. High levels of exposure to mercury, a pollutant and neurotoxin, can harm the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs and immune system. There is always a price to pay.

How about those green electric cars. All you do is plug them in, let them charge up and you are ready to drive.

Guess what? The power that charges most electric cars around the country is mostly generated by burning coal. So those very green cars are powered by coal, adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. Fortunately, electric cars with a reasonable driving range are too expensive for most people.

You might say: “Wait a minute, my power is solar generated, not from coal.” If the array is on your roof, you have to leave your electric car at home during the day to charge it. It can’t be in a parking lot at work or on campus. That reveals the major problem with solar power; it is only generated half the time. There is not yet an efficient way to store it for use at night.

When you consider solar power, don’t overlook the pollution produced while making the solar cells, and unless you have a huge roof it alone cannot charge your electric car. If you get solar power provided by the power company there is not only the manufacturing pollution there also is the huge swath of land taken over by the solar cell array. That land is certainly no longer in its natural state.

If you say your power comes from the wind, think again about the concerns. Consider the 320,000 birds and 800,000 bats that are killed each year by colliding with the blades of wind turbines now, and the estimated 1.4 million birds and many more bats if wind turbines ever reach the goal of 20 percent of our power. There is always a price to pay.

The best option today for a green-thinking person concerning transportation is a high-mileage gas auto, but watch out for the high-mileage gas car that gets good mileage by getting so small that it sacrifices safety. A hybrid car is a pretty good choice, but making and disposing of the batteries in electric and hybrid cars results in serious impacts on the environment. They require special chemicals and result in nasty waste. Again there is always a price to pay.

At home, small things can be done to be green that require very little effort, just a little thought.

For example, close the shades or curtains over windows where the sun comes in. This reduces the heat load on your air conditioning. It also saves your furniture and floors from being sun bleached. If you plan on remodeling, include double-pane windows.

Replace appliances or air conditioners with the most efficient models. All of this is simple, common sense. Above all, when the air conditioning is on, keep the doors and windows closed. Same thing goes for when you use the heat. These changes will also save money on your electric bill.

So, if you are or want to be green, do your research and do some of these simple, inexpensive but effective things. Don't just preach about it.

If more of us took personal action, the environment would get better in a noticeable way.

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