

Watt's Happening? #153

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Climate action: what can we do?



A sustainable lifestyle is not one of sacrifice and hardship. By reducing our use of energy and transportation and downsizing our homes and accumulation of stuff, we can reduce our carbon footprint dramatically while actually improving our quality of life.

Here's an amazing quotation. See if you can guess who's speaking:

"There is still time to save the world's people from the catastrophic consequences of pollution. But time is running out. Carbon dioxide is being added to the earth's atmosphere by the burning of coal, oil and gas at such a rate that by the year 2000 the heat balance will be so modified as possibly to cause changes in climate beyond local or even national efforts."

David Suzuki? Al Gore? No, the president of the American Petroleum Institute, 1965.

How about this one: *"Climate change is the most important challenge facing Canadians. It threatens the very existence of our species."* Canadian Environment Minister Lucien Buchard, 1988.

Then things changed. It was shortly after Buchard's no-nonsense statement that the fossil fuel industry decided to flip 180 degrees, favoring profit over truth, and has since spent hundreds of millions of dollars spreading doubt and miss-information. If there appears to be controversy, that's why. In reality, there is no controversy. Climate change is now not just looming, it is upon us, and we are causing it.

What can we do?

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

If you're wondering what a sustainable lifestyle for you and your family might look like, take a mental journey back to the 1950's, a nostalgic era that many think of as better than today. As far as sustainability goes, it was.

In the 1950's milk was delivered in glass bottles that were collected, cleaned and re-used. Recycling was hardly an issue because there just wasn't much to recycle. Plastic packaging was rare compared to today's single-use glut, and what little there was was made from plant cellulose (cellophane) or skim milk protein (hard, black casein plastic for your rotary telephone). It wasn't weird to take a cloth bag or basket to the grocer's.

Even deluxe upper-middle class homes were modest by today's McMansion standards: one bathroom per home, not one per person. One television, one telephone, one car.

Lots of home cooking, a well-stocked pantry, a quite large garden, a clothesline. Kids played outside a lot with other kids, making them healthy and smart.

Air travel was a special treat or necessity, not something indulged in on a whim every other weekend. Buses and streetcars were everywhere and well used.

Now take that 1950's lifestyle and add into it what we can do today to make it even more sustainable: a modern thermal envelope for the home and modern lighting technology, greatly reducing the energy footprint of the dwelling.

Heat it electrically with a heat pump, drawing energy from the ambient outside air. Make the single vehicle a super low-emission high-mileage hybrid, plug-in hybrid or electric vehicle, powered by nearby inexpensive solar and wind

farms. Instead of your energy and fuel coming in from hundreds or thousands of miles away in wires and pipelines, some or all of it is generated right on your own solar roof, just like some of your food is grown in your own garden instead of shipped in from California or South America.

NOT SO BAD

I don't see a lot of hardship or sacrifice in this up-dated 1950's vision. It's more like a return to sanity.

In fact it might come as a big relief to many that it's OK to have a modest, one-bathroom home with a driveway that does not display a massive motor home with huge truck to pull it, with just one vehicle and no ATVs or snowmobiles, a small lawn, big garden and a clothesline.

This is OK now. In fact, it is "The Way." No more striving for all that stuff.

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, but always start with Reduce. Reduce your stuff,

reduce your energy use, reduce your transportation use, and your quality of life will automatically improve.

Turn off your phone more often. Spend more time outdoors, more time with family and friends, less time striving to make more and more money.

Believe me. It's true. It works. Guaranteed. And it may very well save the world.

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