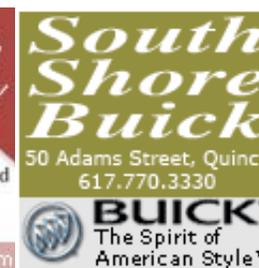


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Green Living Begins At Home

Nate Leskovic 27.DEC.07

With rising utility costs, town officials are exploring use of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind to power municipal buildings. Henry MacLean, a member of the new Wind Energy Committee, says any initiative must involve both efficient creation and reduction of energy.



“It’s like an accident victim. You’ve got to stop the bleeding first,” says MacLean, an architect whose company Timeless Architecture specializes in “green” building.

MacLean says before equipment is installed to harness clean power, energy use should be audited. Inefficiencies can be bottled up, through an “energy diet,” by using audit data to identify ways of improving infrastructure and shifting behavior.

The concept works for homes as well as municipal locations. The calculations help set a target for reductions.

Besides cost savings, energy reduction in buildings is imperative in the overall struggle against climate change. Buildings comprise almost half of all greenhouse gas emissions, according to MacLean.

How Much Energy Do You Use?

“Everybody’s responsible for putting carbon into the atmosphere,” MacLean says. “It’s an exponential curve that’s going off the charts right now.”

To understand how much your home is contributing, gather utility bills and convert the measurements into British thermal units (BTU).



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The following conversions apply: electricity, one KWH = 3,413 BTUs; heating oil, one gallon = 139,000 BTUs; propane, one gallon = 91,000; natural gas, one therm = 100,000; gasoline, one gallon = 124,000; and diesel fuel, one gallon = 139,000.

Divide the yearly total by the square footage of the house to determine its energy utilization rate (EUR). A good house uses about 54,500 BTUs per square foot per year, and an Energy Star home uses 46,000 BTUs. EURs of buildings using renewable energy can be as low as 20,000 BTUs per square foot per year.

To calculate the amount of CO2 a home's energy use puts in the atmosphere—its carbon footprint—use the following conversions: electricity, one KWH = 1.54 lbs of CO2; heating oil, one gallon = 22.1 lbs of CO2; propane, one gallon = 12.7 lbs of CO2, natural gas, one therm = 11.9 lbs of CO2; gasoline, one gallon = 22.1 lbs of CO2, and diesel fuel, one gallon = 19.3 lbs of CO2.

MacLean says an average American produces an average of 50,000 lbs of CO2 per year, more than double the average European.

"It's a real social issue because the basic patterns of how we live have to change," he says. "The general consensus is that we have 10 years as a global community to turn things around. Once 10 years goes by, and we don't make the effort to reduce the greenhouse gases, there is no point of return."

Cutting Your Carbon Footprint

"Conservation is really the best thing to start this process going backwards," says MacLean about climate change. "It's simple for homeowners to start looking at where they can save."

A few simple steps can slash approximately 10 percent of energy use. To start a low carbon diet, do not leave cars idling; drive at a more efficient speed range of 50–60 mph on the highway; use compact fluorescent light bulbs instead of incandescent lights; lower the thermostat (each degree saves about four percent of the load); shut off lights and computers when not in the room or using them; recycle; unplug appliances when not in use that consume energy when in standby mode; use motion sensors for lights; set computer displays to hibernate when inactive; run dishwashers, washers and dryers with full loads only; rinse dishes for dishwashers in cold (not hot) water; limit shower time to two minutes; don't leave water running; and wash white clothes with the warm/cold cycle instead of warm/warm.

Good windows and insulation is also important for conservation.

A Brighter Future

MacLean is optimistic about the town adopting energy-reduction measures and moving forward with a wind power initiative.



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“We’re number two in recycling in the state,” he says. “There’s a real concern about conservation. I think that it’s partly because of the history we have here and the desire to preserve that.”

MacLean hopes the Sustainable Milton organization and the town’s Alternative Energy and Wind Energy committees will empower others to feel less helpless in the face of climate change.

“The more I talk to people about it, the more excited they are,” he says. “There’s got to be a ratcheting-up of action, but I think its happening. We’ve got to get the word out and provide the pathways, but it will be a real invigorating and positive process.”

And what about those who are not following the path?

“I think if they’ve got kids or grandkids, and they understand that the planet they’re leaving is not going to be the one they would want to leave, the sacrifices aren’t really that hard to make,” he says.

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