

## Earth-friendly living: Couple saves energy, recycles for today, future

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Becoming more environmentally friendly is easy - all you have to do is begin, says Rick Jones, science teacher at the Senior Academy.

Jones and his wife, MaryAnn, have made a commitment to going green and staying that way.

"As one of my students said, this is really the only planet that is inhabitable in our solar system," he said. "So we ought to take care of it."

They've invested nearly \$10,000 in their home. And, through the use of solar panels, a new heating system, recycling and electric and hybrids cars, the couple hopes to reduce their carbon footprint substantially.

With the solar panels the couple has already saved 40 percent on electric bills. During the summer, they produce more electricity than they use.

Families that can't afford to put solar panels on their roof can do a number of simple things that will help them conserve energy and save money in the long-run:

- Switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs can reduce the amount of electricity they use, and, even though they cost a little more than regular incandescent bulbs, Jones said, the simple fact that they last a year to two years makes them worth it.

"Regular bulbs lose 90 percent of their energy in the form of heat," he said. "These compact fluorescent bulbs use about one-fifth the electricity of regular light bulbs, and they give off more light and less heat."

- Recycling is an important step, Jones said, especially recycling batteries.

"Our mindsets have to change," he said. "It may be cheaper to buy regular batteries in the short-term, but wouldn't it be cheaper to spend that \$15 on rechargeable batteries that will last four to five years?"

- Recycle aluminum cans and plastic bottles.

This is a really easy way to help the environment," Jones said. "It takes about one-twentieth of the energy to make a can out of a recycled can."

Rather than purchase water in a bottle buy your own reusable bottle.

- Insulate the windows.

Many houses come equipped with drafty windows, and a simple solution is to line them with plastic.

"You can do a whole house for about \$20," Jones said. "That cuts the draft, saves energy and is cheap."

If you can afford it replace the windows with more energy-efficient ones.

- Make sure to cover your air conditioner in the winter, Jones said.

"The cold air, just blows right through there," he said.

- Insulate the attic. Jones said this will help keep the bulk of the heat in your house from escaping.
- In the bathroom, make sure to turn the water off when brushing your teeth, use flow restrictors in the shower and toilet and turn off the lights and fan when the room is empty.

"Carbon monoxide is a big issue but water in Montana is an even bigger issue," Jones said. "Water is critical to the economy of Montana."

- Hang clothes on the line to dry.
- Always wait until you have a full load to run the dishwasher and washing machines.
- Buy EnergyStar appliances.
- Use solar path lights rather than a yard light.
- Take grocery bags back to the store to reuse. Many stores offer an incentive for bringing back bags.
- Donate old clothes to Goodwill or the Montana Rescue Mission.
- Recycle cardboard, including toilet paper and paper towel cores.
- Create a compost heap to fertilize the lawn.
- Reuse glass jars.
- Buy clothes for long term use.
- Buy natural fibers, not synthetics. It takes more energy to create synthetic fibers.
- Buy frozen vegetables rather than canned veggies. The plastic bags containing frozen foods can be easily recycled.
- Buy locally grown foods; it costs less to produce and transport them.
- Buy old books at a used bookstore rather than buying new, or visit the library.
- Think of how many times you can reuse something before you buy it.
- Use washrags rather than disposable sponges.
- Recycle newspaper.

Jones said all the potential solutions have some drawbacks. The biggest challenge, though, is getting people to change the way they think about conservation.

Tax incentives can apply to major changes, Jones said.

People can pay \$3,000 for new windows but can end up getting \$1,500 back in tax incentives.

"It makes that \$3,000 not feel like such a big chunk of money," he said.

"It's important for people to start thinking about the long-term. There is no simple solution, but we need to keep the daily challenge in mind."

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