

# Being GREEN in College

## Simple Steps Students Can Take to Help the Environment

By Alexandra Ries  
NESC Intern

*Editors Note: Alexandra Ries is completing an internship with the National Environmental Services Center during the fall 2011 semester. A major in West Virginia University English Department's Professional Writing and Editing Program, Alex expects to graduate in December.*

Many people think that it's difficult to be eco-friendly in college because it's expensive. Although you probably can't have a solar paneled roof or afford a hybrid car, there are several easy things you can do to help the earth. "Too often we look at the problems around us and think that they are insurmountable," says Mark Kemp, communications director with the National Environmental Services Center (NESC). "Really, though, you don't have to solve everything at once. Taking small steps can make a significant difference." Here are some actions you can take to adopt a greener lifestyle.

### Recycle That Stuff

As college students, we amass many recyclable items: cans and bottles, pizza boxes, and old school newspapers, to name a few. As tempting as it is to burn your organic chemistry notes at the end of the semester, try recycling



them instead. You'll feel an instant gratification knowing you're saving the environment (and knowing there's a possibility that those notes will become toilet paper). If you live in a dorm, ask your resident assistant where the closest recycling bins are. If you live in an apartment, it may take a little more effort. Some apartments offer recycling pick-up, but many do not. Many communities have recycling centers or even curbside pickup for specific items.

### Keep Our Water Clean

Most of us don't think about the water that comes out of our faucet, because it's something we use everyday. But because we use it everyday, it's important that we do think about it. Think of all the things that we send down drains along with our water: dish soap, lotions, shampoo, make-up, unused medications, and more. That's a lot of unnatural and potentially dangerous ingredients mix-



ing with our water, and despite the best efforts of water treatment plants, traces of those ingredients are still found in our drinking water.

“Where water is concerned, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” says Sandra Fallon, NESc training manager. “Keeping unnecessary medicines and personal care products out of our water in the first place helps protect water quality and saves the cost of removing these pollutants later.”

But don't stop drinking water altogether! Instead, do your part to clean up your water source. Use body products that are all or mostly natural. If you get sick and get medication to treat it, use the medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor, even if you feel better before it's all been used. If you need to dispose of any unused drug or medication, don't flush it, unless directed. Take it to a community pharmaceutical take-back program or remove it from its original bottle, mix it with wet coffee grounds or glue, put it in a leak-proof container and throw it in the trash.

### **Eat Greener**

A lot of college students use disposable kitchenware, because it's easy. But it creates a lot of waste. Forgo the plastic sporks and Dixie cups, and buy some cheap kitchenware and dish soap. I use dish soap that's eco-friendly and smells like grapefruit! You can wash the dishes in your bathroom sink. It's simple, and if you're worried about saving money, this will save you a lot of money over time. Also, don't go overboard on napkins. Unless you're eating ribs (which your college budget probably can't afford), one napkin should do. If you can afford it, buy locally grown or organic. Search online, or ask around, to see if the community has a farmer's market.

### **Travel Greener**

Traveling consumes an amazing amount of energy. Although the average student isn't jet-setting around the world for business or holiday, he or she is driving often. We drive home and back on holidays and long weekends, we take road trips with our friends, and many of us drive to classes every day. So the best thing we can do is simply to drive less. Now, don't use it as an excuse to not visit your parents. Instead, try to change your daily habits. Use public transportation. The bus schedule can be a little tricky to decipher, but once you figure out which buses go where at what time, it's a good system. The best method of transportation, by far, is walking. It's probably the fastest method (buses still have to deal with traffic) and its exercise. I walk to cam-

pus, and I've found that it's a lot less stressful to walk than to drive and have to find somewhere to park. Plus, it's a lot cheaper.

### **Carry a Water Bottle**

Sounds simple, right? Carrying your own reusable water bottle will save you a lot of money over time. Think about it: bottled water typically costs at least a dollar a bottle. If you bought one bottle of water every day, you would spend \$365 on water in a year. Why spend this money when you can buy a water bottle for under \$5 and use the water at your dorm or apartment? You're paying for it after all. You can even buy a filter pitcher for less than \$20.

“Drinking tap water instead of bottled water is better for your health and for the environment,” Fallon says. “Our drinking water treatment plants are regulated more rigorously to help ensure the water they provide us is clean and safe, and most plastic water bottles end up in the landfill.”

Going green doesn't have to drain your wallet. In fact, it can do the opposite! Plus, you'll feel better knowing that you're doing your part to help the environment. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead once noted, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

### **For More Information**

For more information about the dangers and prevention of pharmaceuticals and personal body products in the water, check out The Water We Drink website at: [www.nesc.wvu.edu/waterwedrink](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/waterwedrink).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has information about recycling methods at

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserves/rrr/recycle.htm>.

Learn more ways that you can make your daily life more eco-friendly at The Daily Green: [www.thedailygreen.com](http://www.thedailygreen.com).

