

GREEN LIVING TIPS FOR SENIORS

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Swift Current KAIROS Committee for use at EnviroForum 2008)

It is no secret that **Canadians** are among the world's **most prolific consumers of energy, water** and other natural resources, as well as **leaders in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and waste**. Problems, like **Global Warming**, are so big that they cause the average person to feel paralyzed, thinking that big issues need big solutions, and nothing they can do will make a difference anyway...

Most **Seniors** claim to **live rather modestly** and do not own or use **gas-guzzling toys**, such as SUVs, Motorhomes, Snowmobiles, ATVs, Power Boats, Jet Skis, etc, like many of their younger neighbours, and relatives do. However, even seniors living alone in a small house or apartment can take **actions** that, **collectively, will make a significant difference**.

Mahatma Gandhi said "We must be **the change we want to see in the world**." In the same spirit, many simple every day actions are suggested that everyone can do to make a difference.

What Can I Do?

First and foremost, **you should focus daily on the 3Rs: REDUCE – REUSE – RECYCLE!**

In a nutshell, this means:

- **Reduce all waste**, as much as is reasonable, **by buying and consuming only what you really need** and by not accumulating stuff.
- **Reuse whatever and whenever you can**, for instance use plastic bags from shopping trips to line wastebaskets and pails or to collect the droppings from your dog; use large paper bags for parcel wrap, etc.
- **Recycle as much as is possible** by
 - periodically taking all pop cans, tetra-paks, and plastic and glass bottles to SARCAN for cash refunds.
 - weekly taking all paper, cardboard, cleaned glass, metal and plastic materials to the nearest Recycling Depot so as to divert them from the municipal landfill.

With determined and unrelenting focus you will eventually be able to **save enough money** so you can do something really exciting and spiritually enriching that you never before thought you would be able to afford.

The following is a **more detailed listing of various actions** that Seniors can adopt to attain a **greener lifestyle**.

★ Most seniors take daily or as required several different prescription or o.t.c. medicines to maintain adequate health. If expired or unused **drugs** are collecting in your medicine cabinet, **do not flush them** down the toilet and **do not even toss them** in the trash. Instead, **take them to your Pharmacy** for proper disposal in an “environmentally sound way.”

Remember: Roughly 100 different pharmaceuticals have been found, not only in sewage lagoons, but also in the rivers and lakes of the U.S. and Europe.

★ To reduce Food Wastes, **buy only as much perishables** e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables, bread and dairy products, as you can reasonably **eat within one week**.

Remember: About a third of what we throw away and truck to landfills is spoiled food and food scraps.

★ Always try to buy foods and other products that come **without excessive packaging**; opt for those that don't come with any! Decline plastic bags where possible and **bring your own earth-friendly cloth bag** when shopping. If you're buying something that comes in **plastic**, **check the bottom for numbers** (like #1 and #2) that tell you the plastics are **recyclable**. **Buy dry and buy in bulk**, whenever possible, for instance powdered chicken broth or soup goes a lot further than a can of water-filled broth.

Remember: Every Canadian is throwing away more than a pound of plastic packaging per day.

★ You can **greatly reduce the amount of paper** entering your household **by eliminating all junk mail and flyers**. To achieve this, Canada Post requests that you tape a note saying “**No unaddressed Ad Mail please!**” onto the mailbox – and to discourage any deliveries of local flyers, post a second note that reads “**No Flyers please!**” Such actions will, collectively, help to slow down Canada’s alarming rate of **Deforestation**.

Remember: An area the size of P.E.I. is cleared of trees every year from Alberta, Ontario and Quebec.

★ If you own a **Car** – hopefully a small fuel-efficient one (e.g. Honda or Toyota) – try to **use it as little as possible**. Instead of driving yourself, **take public or shared transportation**, whenever possible, for long distances. For short distances, use your feet and **Walk** or pedal your **Bike** for the sake of your own **Health and Fitness** and that of Mother Earth. When you do have to drive, **Drive smartly!** That means:

- no Jackrabbit starts and aggressive driving,
- avoid excessive idling (e.g. more than 30 seconds),
- slow down on the highway to **save fuel** and to arrive safely,
- when doing errands Downtown, walk between stores rather than moving the car three blocks. This is especially important in winter, when engines burn 50% more fuel on short trips than in summer.

Remember: The average car produces between 10,000 and 12,000 pounds of climate-changing, globe-warming carbon dioxide every year.

★ Canadians love to toss **Water** around like we’re H₂O millionaires and according to the OECD we’re the **second-highest** (next to the U.S.) **per capita water users** in the world. In winter, the average **Canadian uses 360 litres per day**, and in summer **daily water use increases to 540 litres**, while the average European uses only 240 litres a day year round.

KAIROS sees **water as a sacred gift** that is to be shared by all mankind. The life-giving liquid becomes especially precious when one considers that **as much as one third of the world's population does not have enough**. Even in Canada, some regions have been hit hard by **drought**, and the future is not bright for the Prairies – what scientists like David Schindler (Univ. of Alberta) say – is fast becoming a **Dust Bowl**.

You can do **your share to conserve water** by:

- taking a bath rather than a shower or by showering for less time and only with a fine spray nozzle,
- not letting the tap run while brushing teeth,
- placing a brick in the toilet tank to reduce flush volumes,
- fixing any leaky or dripping taps, pipes and hoses,
- replacing all or part of the lawn with drought tolerant plants (Xeriscaping)

Remember: Although 70% of planet Earth is covered by water, only 2.5% of the world's water is fresh water, in lakes and rivers – and only 0.007% of the world's water is readily accessible for human use.

★ Everyone knows it is **healthy to drink water frequently** during the day but **why** should it be as **“bottled water”**? Canadians are buying $\frac{3}{4}$ of a billion litres of the stuff annually, and every year **1.5 million tonnes of plastic** go into making – from petroleum – enough bottles to supply our global **bottled water habit**. Why are we sucking back so much bottled water, when in many cases it is **little more than municipal water cleansed of off-putting odours and the taste of chlorine**? Recently, scientists and public health officials have expressed **growing concern that Bisphenol A**, known as an **“endocrine disruptor”** that mimics estrogen, **may be leaching out of the plastics** (especially polycarbonates) of these water bottles. Furthermore, many of these non-biodegradable bottles tend to end up in landfills.

Remember: By buying bottled water, you're encouraging the industry to commodify a priceless public resource, draining underground aquifers and disrupting ecosystems.

★ Many seniors derive at least part of their **retirement or pension income from investments** (RRSPs, RRIFs, etc) **with Banks and Mutual Funds**, made during their working life. From a social or environmental perspective, investment businesses generally have a bad reputation and they are often accused of putting your hard-earned **money** to work **financing dirty gold mines, oil digs and ecologically devastating dams** around the world. For example, all five big Canadian banks are directly or indirectly involved in securing funding for one or more Oil Sands projects in those huge deposits in northern Alberta. **Too bad it takes more energy to squeeze oil from tar sand than it produces**, and that doing so **emits 2 ½ times more GHG** than your typical oil production, **making it the world's Dirtiest Oil**.

However, there are some Banks (Citibank, Citizens Bank of Canada) and many Credit Unions who have socially and ecologically much more responsible lending policies. The majority of **conscious investment funds** out there **are branded as “ethical”** rather than just green. If you're shopping around for ethical funds, there are several to choose from in Canada. For example Acuity has its line of **Clean Environment Funds**, which focus on screening for sustainability and green technology, while the **Ethical Funds Co.** puts out 14 funds filtered for eco-practices and to screen out any involvement with tobacco, weapons, racial inequality and nukes. **Clean Power Income Fund** invests solely in wind, solar, biomass and other forms of renewable energy. Despite old perceptions, **many ethical funds are doing very well in the marketplace and are rewarding their shareholders with good returns.**

Remember: By 2004, Canadians had already invested about \$65 Billion in socially responsible assets - and that number has grown by leaps and bounds every year since then.