

Eco Footprint makes an impact for Earth Day

The new buzz today is consumerism. Not a new idea but certainly one that is making its impact, good or bad. With 20% of the world's population consuming 80% of the world's resources, there is something wrong, something destructive, and something that we can actually do to change the state of things.

This new buzz consumerism was challenged by a group of students at Portland State winter term 2003, by taking a look at their eco footprint. What is this eco footprint you might ask? It is a tool, a quick 16 question online quiz developed by Redefining Progress to assess one's individual lifestyle in the categories of food, shelter, transportation and goods & services. The final tally gives a total acreage required to maintain your current lifestyle. For example, the American today has an average footprint size of 24 acres required for his lifestyle. Given if everyone in the world would be like the average American, there would need to be 4.5 planets. How would that be possible? It's not. That is what the students in Gossen's Environmental Sustainability class discovered and they took action to determine whether they could make an impact of change over a 10 week period.

With another online tool called "turn the tide" there are 9 easy steps to changing one's lifestyle that changes human impact on the environment. For instance, driving one day less a week, or eating less meat, or perhaps changing 3 compact fluorescents for incandescents can add up to big impacts really fast.

Let's see how these students did over a 10 week period:

Cumulative they saved over 8,000 pounds of Co2 by driving one less trip a week and taking mass transportation, walking, or biking. By eating less meat they saved over 816 pounds of grain and thousands of gallons of water required for cows, and lost weight and felt healthier. By reducing a 20 minute shower to 10 minutes, some students saved 458, 708 gallons of water. Money saved on gasoline and parking tickets by driving less once a week totaled over \$1028.

One student traded her coffee habit to a reusable mug habit and saved 75 paper cups and lids that didn't make it to the landfill. Also by stopping junk mail, they saved hundreds of pounds of paper that comprises over 50% of today's landfills. Not to mention saving more trees, creating less dioxins, and preventing soil erosion.

Shrimp in the manner it is caught by modern nets kills 12 pounds of marine life for every pound of shrimp caught, and those students that opted to eliminate shrimp from their diet over the 10 weeks saved over 30 pounds of marine life.

This is a really easy tool, that is fun and insightful about really simple things you can change in your everyday life that make a huge impact on the natural environment. In a world today where things seem beyond the reach of change and positive impact, we challenge you to take the quiz and make an impact for yourself. Go to <http://www.rprogress.org/>, or visit the web page of Gossen at www.solar783.com for more information about the environmental sustainability class and the ecofootprint link.

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