

Sunday, April 23, 2006 - 12:00 AM

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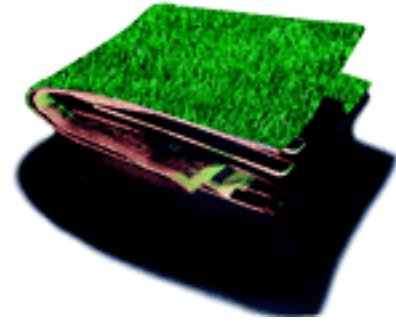
EcoConsumer

Get green, save green

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Being green would be so much easier if money was no object. I could zip to work in my electric car, then come home to my solar-powered house, built with only top-of-the-line recycled materials.



SUSAN JOUFLAS / THE SEATTLE TIMES

But for most of us, money doesn't just talk — it shouts. Although we occasionally might be willing to pay more for something because of the environmental or social benefits, most of the time price matters.

Saturday marked the 36th anniversary of Earth Day. Here's my list of top five actions you can take to help both the planet and your pocketbook:

Go with the info flow. There's a bounty of free consumer and environmental resources available today fueled by the Internet. Start with www.kcecoconsumer.com, a gateway to dozens of resources. For cars and appliances, visit www.fueleconomy.gov and www.energystar.gov.

Consumer Reports offers a free environmental resources Web site, www.greenerchoices.org. Simply buying a durable product that best fits your needs can reduce waste, conserve resources and save money. Product review summaries at www.consumersearch.com help you compare products for quality.

Take your foot off the gas. Driving is the most environmentally-harmful activity most consumers do, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. Any steps you take to reduce driving will help. Live closer to work; get rid of your second vehicle; car-share; pick at least one day a week to walk, bike or take the bus to work; choose fuel-efficient vehicles. For help, see www.commuterchoice.com/seattle.

One easy action to take: Check your tires. A Canadian government study found that 70 percent of cars have one or more tires improperly inflated by at least 10 percent. By keeping tires properly pumped up

— which improves gas mileage and conserves fuel — the average car-owner can save nearly \$800 over the typical seven-year life of a vehicle, according to the study.

Say no to new. Buying used products may be the single best method to save money and reduce waste. In his new book "FutureShop," author Daniel Nissanoff predicts the growth of a new "auction culture," where Americans will mostly lease products, buy them used or quickly resell items they bought new.

We're on our way. Internet auction and classified sites have revolutionized commerce in America. Throw in the resurgence of thrift and consignment stores, and the multitude of specialty Web sites selling used products or offering leased items, and you have hardly any reason to buy things new.

Clean to save some green. Cutting back on disposable products and chemical cleaners can save you hundreds of dollars a year. Manufacturers push these products and invent new ones because they're hugely profitable. Once you're hooked on the Swiffer or similar products, you just keep buying those replacement disposable cloths.

Look for companies selling antibacterial wipes and chemical cleaners to increasingly play the "sanitation card." They may imply that you need their products to fight bird flu and other potential illness and bacteria threats. That could be true in a few cases, but most of those products will not keep you safer.

Consider alternatives, including reusable cleaning cloths and mops. When you run low on chemical products, such as window cleaners, see if you can meet your cleaning needs with non-toxic, homemade cleaners made from lemon juice, vinegar or baking soda.

Live small and prosper. Houses have been getting larger, but the tide may be turning. A recent "green building" conference in Seattle for home builders highlighted a movement toward smaller homes.

Living in less space will save you money from heating to yard care. You'll also save time and reduce stress with less cleaning and upkeep. And if your home is made of wood, in 90 years of recycling all your paper, you wouldn't save as many trees as you would buying a 1,500-square-foot home instead of a 7,000-square-foot one, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists.

You don't have to be an eco-saint. But you should be able to easily incorporate at least a few of these practices into your lifestyle.

Tom Watson: tom.watson@metrokc.gov. Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at www.kcecoconsumer.com