

Homes & Real Estate

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Green goals: Simple ways to make a difference in 2015

We can make sure eco-consciousness plays a key role in our life by including at least one green goal on our 2015 list. Consider these timely choices for enviro-resolutions.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

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Got any room left on your list of New Year's resolutions?

Environmental issues connect with everything else we care about, so they certainly deserve a shout out. "Green" resolutions can help the world and make our own life better — if we follow through with them, that is.

We can make sure eco-consciousness plays a key role in our life by including at least one green goal on our 2015 list. Consider these timely choices for enviro-resolutions.

Green your light bulbs

Energy-efficient LED (light-emitting diode) light bulbs keep getting better and less expensive. Use LEDs to replace at least three light bulbs that burn out in the coming year.

Find practical light-bulb shopping tips from Consumer Reports and other sources by searching online for "LED light bulb guide." Compact fluorescent lamps (CFL bulbs) may not perform quite as well as LEDs, but they are less expensive and a good choice for certain uses.

Also resolve to always recycle CFLs and fluorescent tubes. Because they contain a small amount of mercury, it's illegal to put them in the garbage.

Take advantage of increasing opportunities for recycling mercury-containing lights through a new statewide program called LightRecycle Washington, set up by the lighting industry under state law. Find out about recycling locations and learn about mail-in recycling opportunities at lightrecyclewa.org. The program starts Jan. 1.

Residents, businesses and organizations will be able to drop off up to 10 mercury-containing lights per day at authorized collection locations, at no charge. The program is funded through a 25-cent-per-light environmental handling fee added to the retail price of lights.

Connect on climate change

Our consumer choices relate to global climate change.

Become a part of the solution by resolving to take an active role in a community group or activity related to climate change.

This could involve participation in a clothing swap or tool-lending library, or joining a green community organization such as CoolMom (coolmom.org) in Seattle or Sustainable Vashon (sustainablevashon.org). The Seattle-based statewide chapter of the Sierra Club (sierraclub.org/washington) has been especially active on climate-change-related issues recently.

Expand food horizons

The meat industry produces nearly 15 percent of the world's human-related greenhouse gas emissions, according to a 2013 United Nations report. One day a week, take a bite out of this beefy contribution to climate change by joining in the international Meatless Monday movement.

Thankfully, the Seattle area overflows with creative options for finding delicious alternatives to meat, as well as ethically raised meat and sustainable seafood. Commit to visiting a farmers market at least once a month, join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program to get seasonal local produce (pugetsoundfresh.org/find-csa), or buy at least five locally produced food items every time you visit the grocery store.

Shine on

Make 2015 the year you find out from a professional whether solar panels would be a good fit for your roof. If they are, take the plunge.

The innovative nonprofit Solarize Washington (solarizewa.org) program helps communities leverage group buying power so individual homeowners get significant discounts on solar-panel installation. If you have already gone solar and have a long commute, make your next car electric, as a rewarding way to jointly green up your home and road time.

Know your chemicals

For products you use regularly, make a commitment to read the label at least once. Avoid personal-care products such as toothpaste or facial scrubs that have polyethylene on the ingredients list. That means they have plastic microbeads that may end up in Puget Sound or other waterways.

Check the federal Household Products Database (householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov) or the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep Cosmetics Database (ewg.org/skindeep) at least monthly to learn about potentially hazardous chemicals in specific products.

Last resolution: Have a healthy, green, fun 2015.

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