



12 Simple Ways to Go Green in 2012

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Recycle symbol and planet Earth

With each New Year, people typically resolve to eat better and exercise more often, to save more money and spend more time with family and friends. This year, consider a commitment to reducing your environmental impact by living a bit greener.

The United Nations designated 2012 the "International Year of Sustainable Energy for All" since broadening access to sustainable energy is essential to solving many

of the world's challenges including food production, security and poverty.

According to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who is leading the initiative to ensure universal access to modern energy services, improve efficiency and increase the use of renewable sources, energy is central to nearly every major challenge and opportunity the world faces today.

"Sustainable energy is needed for strengthening economies, protecting ecosystems and achieving equity," he says. "Access to energy transforms lives by helping people generate income, provide health care services, improve education and protect the environment."

Here in northwest Indiana, NIPSCO has introduced two renewable clean energy program options designed to provide customers who already own or plan to purchase a solar, wind, hydro or biomass system the opportunity to offset their individual usage each month (Net Metering) or sell the power they generate to NIPSCO (Feed-in Tariff) once they are connected to the grid.

As the demand for sustainable energy continues to rise, programs such as these will also help slow the need for NIPSCO to invest in additional non-renewable power resources.

Steve Francis, Hoosier Chapter chairperson of the Sierra Club which is promoting a Beyond Coal to Clean Energy campaign across the country believes NIPSCO has the most innovative program anywhere.

"The Sierra Club is very enthusiastic about working with NIPSCO leading the way with the implementation of a Feed-in Tariff and Net Metering expansion - particularly for wind, solar, hydro and sustainable bio-mass," he said. "We feel that this will put Indiana on the map as a model for distributed renewable generation in the Midwest while also creating good jobs in the renewable power sector."

While generating renewable energy may not be on everyone's list of resolutions for 2012, there are a number of other simple steps we can all take toward a more sustainable future.

According to the Worldwatch Institute, the most successful and lasting New Year's resolutions are those that are practiced regularly and have an important goal. Here are 12 simple ways you can go green this year:

(1) Recycle -- Put a separate container next to your trash can or printer, making it easier to recycle bottles, cans and paper.

(2) Turn off the lights -- Make an impact every day by turning off lights during bright daylight and whenever you will be away for extended periods of time.

(3) Make the switch -- Reduce electric bills and carbon emissions with light bulbs. Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) use just 20-30% of the energy required by incandescents to create the same amount of light. LEDs use only 10%.

(4) Turn on the tap - Use water from the sink to fill glasses and reusable bottles. Eliminating bottled water saves money and helps reduce the nearly one million tons of bottles that go into landfills each year.

(5) Turn down the heat -- Use a programmable thermostat to control settings.

(6) Support food recovery programs - Periodically go through your cabinets for donations of non-perishable food items you won't be using and encourage local organizations/restaurants/grocery stores to partner with the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana.

(7) Buy local -- Support business owners who are also invested in your community, including sources for the freshest produce, eggs, dairy and meat.

(8) Get out and ride -- Designated lanes and inter-connected trails make it easier and safer to use a bike for transportation and recreation.

(9) Share a car -- Join or start a car share program to reduce the challenges of finding parking (look for designated car share program spaces) as well as your environmental impact when running errands or commuting for work.

(10) Plant a garden -- Growing your own vegetables in a small outdoor plot can make a big impact on your diet and wallet. During the winter, window boxes planted in full sun can yield enough lettuce for several salads or a nice variety of flavorful herbs.

(11) Compost -- Fertilize your garden with leftovers to reduce waste and your reliance on costly alternative products.

(12) Reduce meat consumption -- You don't have to be a vegetarian or vegan. Cutting back on the amount of meat you consume in just one week goes a long way.