

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Green guardians go extra mile to save planet

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Saturday, April 21, 2007



Chronicle / Michael Macor, 2003

Maya Butterfield, the mother of four children, drives as little as possible while she waits for a car company to sell a hybrid minivan. The Rev. Sally Bingham tells her Grace Cathedral congregants that it's an insult to the Creator if they don't take care of the Earth.

UC Berkeley student Sam Arons lobbied to move the campus toward energy efficiency. And lawyer-turned-teacher Will Parish installed solar panels on his roof and double panes on his windows. He takes short showers, takes his own bags to the store, and eschews bottled water in favor of good old Hetch Hetchy Valley brew.

Parish and others say they're doing as their friends are: clamping down on energy consumption and actively working to prevent the grimmest global warming projections from coming true.

More people think controlling global warming is a moral and ethical issue. Thousands of events are planned around the globe for this weekend's Earth Day celebrations, and millions of people are joining in. They're also writing to their elected leaders, cleaning beaches and rivers, and looking at how they can help cut pollution.

In one example of growing activism, during the last two months, more than 500,000 people have written to ask the federal government to do more to protect polar bears, a species threatened because its Arctic home is melting. The outcry represents the most public comment ever received about an issue involving the Endangered Species Act, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

People changing their lives will make a difference, said Arthur Rosenfeld, an 80-year-old scientist who is called the "father of energy efficiency" for his three decades of work to improve the energy use of appliances and buildings. His work started at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

"Is it important if individuals vote? No one person swings an election. But if we all vote, we move in the right direction," said Rosenfeld, who is a member of the California Energy Commission.

If every household in the United States swapped just one incandescent bulb for a compact fluorescent, it would save enough energy to light 7 million homes for a year, save \$660 million in utility bills, and reduce as much greenhouse gas as taking 1 million cars off the road for a year, according to the nonprofit Alliance to Save Energy in Washington, D.C. Such movements often start at home. Here's how some people are making a difference:

Will Parish, 54, changed the course of his life nearly 25 years ago to actively help the environment.

He quit his job as a lawyer and developed a \$46 million power plant that used manure as fuel. With the waste from 400,000 cows, the Imperial Valley plant generated enough electricity for 20,000 houses.

Parish sold the plant in the late 1990s and started teaching science at San Francisco's Gateway High School. His daily life -- from what he eats to how he commutes to work to how he showers and washes his clothes -- is an exercise in reducing his impact on the planet.

"I try to buy products that are grown within 100 miles of my house," said Parish, who rides his bicycle to work. "I bought a front-load washer and dryer and low-flow shower heads and toilets.

"I use recycled paper and biodegradable detergents and soaps. I eat meat only occasionally and recharge my batteries at my home station."

Maya Butterfield, 42, who once searched for a hybrid minivan to haul her kids -- 16-year-old twins, an 8-year-old and a 5-year-old -- said she's trying not to drive much at all.

"But when I do, I want to drive something that I feel good about," said the Web designer, who lives in Fairfax.

Toyota has promised to make hybrid models across its fleet, she said, but has not yet delivered a minivan in the United States. Because she needs to haul her husband, Geoff, the kids and their bicycles, the family bought a Rav4, which gets 24 to 27 miles per gallon.

The Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit group with experts in energy efficiency, unveiled its own minivan, the UCS Vanguard, in March to show that U.S. carmakers could build an affordable model with existing technology that meets or exceeds California's greenhouse gas standards. The U.S. industry, which hasn't begun to produce hybrid vans, is challenging the state standards in court.

For now, Butterfield said, "we try to do things locally." The family put in double-pane windows and efficient appliances. She dries most of the clothes outside. She also is a member of the Safe Routes-to-School Committee at Manor Elementary School.

"This year, it really took off. We've had a huge increase of people walking and biking to school," she said. "There's a big movement here of people trying to cut back."

The Rev. Sally Bingham had a personal epiphany more than 20 years ago when she realized that people were thoughtlessly and recklessly wasting the planet's resources. Later, as the environmental minister at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, she "recognized that the church was silent on the care of the Earth."

"When I listened to people in the church praying for reverence to the Earth, and then they would drive away in their SUVs, I saw the disconnect between what people said they believed in and their behavior," she said.

Nowadays, she has spoken to the congregation so much about energy efficiency that she's "sold more hybrid cars than Toyota," she said. "Ten years ago, people were very skeptical. Global warming wasn't really a problem; it wasn't human-induced, they said." But in the last three years, people have begun to realize that the message is real, said Bingham, 65.

She formed an ecumenical group to mobilize a religious response to global warming,

which later grew into the California Interfaith Power and Light. The state group encompasses 450 congregations, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and others. Nationwide, there are 4,000 congregations.

"God provides us with these amazing clean natural resources and set the world into motion and in balance. We've been created in the image of God. It's our human responsibility to be caretakers of these gifts."

Sam Arons, 25, who grew up in Berkeley, recalls one of his early environmental moments: Workers from the Ecology Center came to his elementary school class, and together they danced the "Recycle Boogie."

Now a graduate student at UC Berkeley in the Energy and Resources Group, he led a successful effort last week to pass a student referendum imposing a \$5-per-student fee each semester to raise \$200,000 a year for a Green Initiative Fund to improve energy efficiency on campus. Students at UC's Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz campuses have passed similar measures.

"Students are sending a really strong message on what they care about," said Arons, who spent nine months working on the measure.

Proponents set up tables in Sproul Plaza and used Facebook.com, a social networking Web site, to lobby students.

Arons got interested when he considered the millions of people around the world who would be harmed by rising oceans. "There are a lot of dangers of climate change, and hardship could be avoided if we could do something about it," he said.

Does he feel overwhelmed about the dire projections for global changes forecast in his lifetime?

"If I felt overwhelmed, I would just give up. That doesn't seem like a solution," Arons said. "So I feel I should keep working and make changes in my own life and try to make a difference."

What if we changed?

Some examples of how people can make a difference:

- After the 1973 gasoline shortage, the California Energy Commission was formed. Since then, California's per-capita energy use has stayed the same. In contrast, energy use nationwide has jumped 50 percent.
- If the nation could triple its energy efficiency over 30 years, it would be unnecessary to build new power plants to accommodate growth.
- If everyone who lived within 5 miles of their job rode a bike once a week, it would save the amount of greenhouse gases produced by almost 1 million cars.

Sources: California Energy Commission, Carnegie Institution at Stanford University,  
Environmental Defense

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