

EST, Home Hazards

Feature material – low carbon lifestyle plan

The majority of us are more concerned about climate change than any other social issue and one in five of us would like to lead a 'greener' lifestyle. Despite this, almost half of us are unaware of the environmental damage our homes and lifestyles are responsible for. In fact, annually, your home could be responsible for around six tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂), one of the leading contributors to climate change.

Burning fossil fuels to generate energy or heat produces CO₂ - the main greenhouse gas. Under Kyoto protocol, the Government is required to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent of 1990 levels by the Kyoto Period of 2008-2012. But because our seemingly harmless homes and cars make up over 50 per cent of the UK's total CO₂ emissions, we all have a role to play.

By following the Energy Saving Trust's (EST) 'Low-carbon Lifestyle Guide', we can all reduce the environmental impact of our homes and often save money in the process. The plan offers simple tips on how to remedy every badly behaved aspect of your home, from energy and water wastage to recycling and chemical cleaners.

1. A bright idea

If you want to reduce the carbon your home produces, you have to reduce your energy consumption. Buying energy-saving lightbulbs are one of the easiest ways to save energy, money and the environment. For each bulb you fit, you could save 44 kg of CO₂ and £7 every year. If every UK home replaced three ordinary bulbs with energy-saving ones, we would save over 1.5 million tonnes of CO₂ annually and the electricity equivalent to the output of a typical power station every year!

2. Boiling point

From 1st April 2005, all boilers installed in England and Wales must be condensing boilers in the 'A' and 'B' bands. High-efficiency condensing boilers are more efficient than standard boilers (spelling savings of up to a third on typical annual heating bills!) and also benefit the environment by reducing your home's CO₂ emissions by one tonne. If every UK home had a high-efficiency condensing boiler, we would save 17.5 million tonnes of CO₂ per year and enough energy to heat nearly 5 million homes for the same period.

3. Ransack your rubbish

According to Recycle Now, your home produces around one tonne of rubbish annually. To cut this down, separate and recycle your paper, glass and plastic waste. Opting for recycled and recyclable products with minimal packaging will also help to reduce the environmental impact of your waste. If every UK home recycled 50 per cent of their rubbish, our annual CO₂ emissions would fall by up to six million tonnes. To find out where you can recycle in your local area, contact your local authority or simply reuse your old carrier bags when you go shopping.

4. Live the good life

According to Recycle Now, nearly 50 per cent of what we throw away is biodegradable meaning that it could be turned into compost. Making your own compost is a great way to save money and help your garden and houseplants by improving the quality of your soil. It also benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfill sites.

5. Fill cavities

Uninsulated walls account for up to 33 per cent of the heat lost in your home so insulating them is one of the most effective ways to save energy in the home. Filling cavity walls could save around one tonne of CO₂ and up to £100 every year. Grants are available through EST to help with the costs. Log onto www.est.org.uk for more information or call 0845 727 7200.

6. All mod cons

The next time you replace your kitchen appliances, look out for the Energy Efficiency Recommended (EER) logo (an orange and blue label) as an EER appliance uses less energy and will cost you less to run than ordinary appliances. An EER fridge-freezer for example, could save you 230 kg of CO₂ and £35 a year. If we upgraded the UK's cold appliances to energy-saving ones, we would save 6 million tonnes of CO₂ each year – enough to fill over 35 million double-decker buses! We would also save over £950 million worth of energy annually.

7. How green is your home?

Natural cleaning products can be used on the filthiest of homes. White wine vinegar can bring sparkle to windows, lemon juice and warm water is a great alternative to bleach and baking soda can remove stains from carpets as well as dissolve dirt and grease. Alternatively, opt for phosphate free products that do not upset the balance of the natural systems in rivers and lakes.

8. Green fingered

We can limit the effects of chemical pesticides by making sure we dispose of household chemicals correctly. Pouring weed killer down the drains pollutes water and can kill wildlife. Instead, contact your local council for information on how to deal with unwanted pesticide products and collection services.

9. Leg work

With road transport responsible for 26 per cent of the UK CO₂ emissions, we should be walking or using public transport whenever we can. Reduce the amount of CO₂ your car emits by switching off your engine when stuck in traffic jams and sharing lifts when you can. Regularly tuning your car and checking tyre pressures will also help to cut your CO₂ emissions. Motorists who drive 100 miles a week generate 1,430 kg of CO₂ a year, but people travelling the same distance on trains would be responsible for 319kg, and those travelling the same distance by bus for just 268kg. Better still, walk or cycle.

10. Hot houses

With the temperatures rising, your skin and the environment could do with a break from the damaging effects of central heating. By turning down your thermostat by just one degree, you could reduce your home's CO₂ emissions by 400kg and save around £30 a year on your energy bills. If we all did this today, we would save over £650 million worth of energy and nearly nine million tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year.

11. Wrap up warm

An insulating jacket for your hot water tank can reduce its heat loss by 75 per cent and save 150kg of CO₂ and £10 - £15 every year. We could cut CO₂ our emissions by two million tonnes every year - enough to fill 11 million double-decker buses - if everyone in the UK put a jacket on their hot water tank.

12. Switch to a green energy supplier

Switching to a green electricity tariff is one of the easiest ways to make a difference to the environment - a quick phone call or a visit to a website can reduce your CO₂ emissions. If you switch to a supplier that provides renewable electricity, the energy will come from clean, green and sustainable energy sources such as wind or hydroelectric power. Log onto www.ukgreenpower.co.uk for more information.

13. Superior interiors

The use of certain compounds in conventional paints can lead to global warming. So, if your house is in need of a makeover, opt for solvent free paints that do not contain any harmful compounds. They come in a range of colours and finishes and can be found in most large DIY stores.

14. Water lot of waste

Water as a resource is often taken for granted in the UK. To conserve water, don't leave taps running, opt for a shower instead of the tub (they use just two-fifths of the hot water needed for a bath), wash your car with a bucket instead of a hose and use your washing machine only with a full load.

15. Lighten the load

Set your washing machine to as cool a wash as possible. Modern washing powders are just as effective at lower temperatures. Washing your clothes at 40 degrees rather than 60 uses a third less electricity, so a third less CO₂.

To find out more about how to reduce the environmental impact of your home, call 0845 727 7200 or log onto www.est.org.uk.