

## Becoming a Green Building Advocate

### In Your Office or Workplace

There are many things you can do where you work to promote green buildings and sustainable design. Here are a few brief suggestions you can implement right away.

#### *Reducing Your Carbon Footprint*

In early 2007 Swiss Re, a major global insurance company, announced that it would be supporting investments and purchases made by employees that contribute to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The new “COYou2 reduce and gain” program is part of Swiss Re’s commitments supporting the Clinton Global Initiative. In 2003 Swiss Re declared that it would make its own operations carbon neutral by 2013. Now, as part of the Clinton Global Initiative, Swiss Re has decided to support measures taken by its employees that contribute to the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The “COYou2 reduce and gain” program supports employees’ investments in measures that contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly in relation to mobility, heating and electrical energy. Such measures, which vary according to regional circumstances and preferences, include low-emission hybrid cars, use of public transport and the installation of solar panels or heat pumps. From now until the end of 2011, Swiss Re plans to rebate each employee one-half of the amounts invested in these measures, up to a maximum per employee of 5,000 Swiss francs (about \$4,000) or the equivalent in local currency.

According to Ivo Menzinger, Head of Sustainability & Emerging Risk Management, who is in charge of the “COYou2 reduce and gain” program,

“Swiss Re is actively engaged in mitigating climate change and its consequences. This program is an investment that will encourage our employees to make a personal contribution and further raises awareness of the issue.”<sup>1</sup>

Take action with your company or business. Some easy steps to take include:

- If you operate a fleet of vehicles, convert them all to hybrids and cut your normal gasoline consumption by 35% to 50%.
- Subsidize employees’ use of public transit, at least 50% or more.
- Discourage single occupancy vehicle use by not paying for parking.
- Provide secured bicycle storage in your building with shower facilities or nearby health club passes to encourage people to ride to work in good weather. (This is also a great “wellness” initiative.)
- Buy Green Tags or other “carbon offsets” to cover 100% of your annual travel mileage by car, bus, ferry and airplane. (There are a large number of organizations that cater to this need.)
- Buy green power for the electricity consumption of your workplace; wind-generated power is widely available from a large number of reputable organizations; make sure it is “Green-e” certified from the Center for Resource Solutions.<sup>2</sup>
- Begin the journey to sustainability by examining all of your operations, to see how to reduce their environmental footprint; this activity can involve everyone in the organization; even simple steps like eliminating wastebaskets under individual desks in favor of paper recycling boxes sends a simple message, as does having the IT department set all the printer default setting to “duplex” so people will stop printing on one side of the paper for internal use.
- Undertake a LEED-EB assessment of your existing building operations; LEED for Existing Buildings is a comprehensive evaluation and benchmarking system that will help you “green” your operations and engage the entire workforce in the effort.
- Buy laptops and flat-panel monitors for everyone to cut energy use from “plug loads,” often 20% or more of the total energy use of an office.
- Re-lamp and install lighting controls, so you are using only the most efficient fixtures and lights don’t operate when people aren’t using a room or office.
- Join the US Green Building Council as a corporate or agency member and become part of the solution; once you join, everyone in the company or agency can enjoy the membership benefits.

- Study all of the other aspects of your business operations and work to change each aspect, over time, to more sustainable options, then encourage employees to take those same principles home.

## In Your Home or Apartment

The most powerful agent of change is your own personal experience. Think of what you can do to promote green buildings and green operations where you live. Here are a few examples:

- Start keeping track of your gas, electricity and water use, along with the number of gallons of gasoline purchased and airline miles flown.
- Try to cut down on energy and water use by 10% in the next year by examining all of your habits and seeing where you can combine trips or cut down on optional travel.
- Go even beyond 10% reduction: create a “year of living sustainably” that commits you to dramatic changes in lifestyle to meet sustainability goals; if you have kids, enlist their help and creativity. It will strongly supplement the education they’re typically getting in school.
- If you can’t stop traveling, because of your job or family needs, then start by purchasing “carbon offsets” or Green Tags for all of your mileage, so that you’re offsetting their impact with clean power or tree plantings somewhere else.
- Buy a hybrid car or a more fuel-efficient vehicle; you can find the top ten green cars each year listed by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.<sup>3</sup>
- Look into state and federal incentives for installing solar electric and thermal systems on your home; if you’re a renter, discuss the benefits of doing this with your landlord or management company.
- Call the local gas or electric utility company and ask for a home energy audit to find out what are the “low-cost/no-cost” things you can do to cut down on energy consumption; in some areas, the local water company will offer technical assistance or free kits for cutting water consumption.
- Install dual-flush toilets to cut water use from toilet flushing by half or more; install other water-conserving measures such as drip irrigation.
- Form a neighborhood “sustainable living” group to engage the creativity of others in finding additional ways to cut energy and water use, reduce the use of poisons in landscape maintenance and enhance local recycling efforts.
- Consider your purchasing patterns and their “upstream” impacts, including waste in production, transportation costs (if made far from

where you live) and embedded energy of production, distribution, use and disposal.

- For home remodeling, try to support local retail stores that specialize in sustainable products, such as healthy paint and carpet and reclaimed or salvaged building materials.

### Your Town, City or State: The Power of Local Initiatives

Just as “all politics is local,” a statement famously attributed to former speaker of the US House of Representatives Tip O’Neill, all successful sustainability efforts have their roots in local action. With more than 16 states and 60 cities (as of early 2007) offering local initiatives to promote green buildings, there is ample precedent for you to engage your local school board, city council, country board or commission and even state representatives in this effort. Drill down into each green building success story and you will find just a few local people, some in government, some in business and some plain citizens, whose energy and foresight have made the difference. Some of the initiatives already enacted, on which you can model your efforts, include:

- At the local level, secure a commitment from a school district, city or county to build all future buildings and schools to at least the LEED Silver level; some communities have committed to build LEED Gold projects (the earliest on record was the City of Vancouver, British Columbia); this may take some doing because you’re going to hear the old familiar refrain “it costs too much,” and you’ll have to convince people otherwise by using the examples in this book; among the North American cities making this commitment are Seattle, Sacramento, Portland (OR), Tucson, San Francisco, Calgary and Madison (WI).
- Some cities are taking the next step after greening their own operations, requiring larger private-sector projects to meet LEED certified or Silver-level certifications within the next few years. (Large cities such as Boston and Washington, DC, have done this, and more cities will be requiring such achievements or incorporating LEED requirements and Architecture 2030 milestones into the building code in the next few years.)
- If you have a municipal electric utility or public utility district, convince it to offer incentives for energy conservation and solar energy systems; often the large cash flows of a utility permit it to offer incentives that will, over time, allow it to offset expensive purchases of additional generating capacity in the future; in Texas, Austin Energy, a municipal utility, has been promoting green homes since the early 1990s



Designed by Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and completed in 2006, the Santa Monica City Library received LEED Gold certification. This building features a central urban location and welcomes the public with lots of daylighting and a central courtyard with its own coffee shop.

and has one of the most successful green home rating systems in the country.

- Convince your mayor or city council to sign onto the US Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, which commits cities to becoming carbon neutral within the next decade, or sooner, in their own operations;<sup>4</sup> at the global level, former US President Clinton's Climate Change Initiative is engaging the 40 largest cities in the world to become carbon neutral over the next 20 to 30 years.<sup>5</sup> (Already, London has signed on to this initiative.) In Denver, Mayor John Hickenlooper has been aggressively promoting the Greenprint Denver plan for sustainable development,<sup>6</sup> and in Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley has vowed to make Chicago the "greenest city" in North America by promoting green buildings, green roofs and street tree plantings.
- Convince your city council or country commission/board to offer incentives to private sector projects that commit to building green; successful incentives include faster processing of building permits and

increased “density bonuses” for high-rise offices, apartments and condominium developments; if you know a state legislator, talk to them about sponsoring state initiatives to promote green buildings and renewable energy; successful initiatives have included personal and/or corporate income tax credits (Oregon and New York, along with 23 other states); property tax abatements for LEED Silver or better certifications (Nevada); sales tax elimination on solar systems (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maryland and 12 other states); and rebates for purchase of solar systems (California, Arizona, Colorado and 30 other states).<sup>7</sup>

- Have the governor or state legislature require the state utility commission to have all investor-owned utilities collect a tax on utility bills and offer “public purpose” funds for investments in conservation, onsite power and renewable energy; in 2007 the California Public Utilities Commission adopted an incentive payment system in the form of a consumer rebate, to encourage people to install photovoltaic systems on their roofs; the goal is “a million solar roofs” within ten years.<sup>8</sup>

## Your College or University

A college or university is often the largest employer in a town or city; it has a huge impact on energy use, carbon footprint, water use and other municipal services. It also serves as an example to thousands of students, faculty and staff. Make sure that your college or university is doing what it can to promote sustainable operations. A new organization formed to promote campus sustainability efforts, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), attracted more than 150 campuses as dues-paying members in 2006, its first year of operations.<sup>9</sup> In October 2006 AASHE’s first national conference attracted more than 600 people. By early 2007 dozens of campuses all over the country had appointed sustainability directors or coordinators and had begun to implement successful sustainability programs.

One campus that has made sustainability a core part of its mission is Arizona State University (ASU), the country’s largest, with more than 60,000 enrolled students, which created, funded and staffed an Office of Sustainability Initiatives in 2005 under the enlightened leadership of President Michael Crow.<sup>10</sup> In 2007 ASU began offering five degree programs in sustainability studies, the first in the country by a major university.

Harvard University has embarked on a major campaign of sustainability initiatives in buildings. The director, Leith Sharp, has run this program since 2001. She reports that the annual return on investment for Har-

vard's energy efficiency and green building programs is about 36%, about twice that of Harvard's multi-billion-dollar endowment.<sup>11</sup> In other words, to improve their rate of return, Harvard's endowment managers would be well advised to put as much money as possible into the campus's sustainability initiatives! The same could be said for most private universities.