

Be JMU 'eco-WISE'

Individual actions support a sustainable future

BY CHRISTIE-JOY "C.J." BRODRICK HARTMAN




REMEMBER Kermit the Frog's lamentation (circa 1970s): "It's not easy being green." Although today's green, which symbolizes environmental consciousness, differs from Kermit's reference, the statement, "It's not easy being green," is applicable to today's environmental challenges. Population growth, climate change and fossil fuel consumption are among myriad factors that necessitate we re-examine, and perhaps reinvent, our approach to fundamental systems such as energy. Despite the frequent headlines we read, "Ten tips to save the Earth in five minutes a day," Thomas Friedman is correct in his national bestseller, *Hot, Flat and Crowded*: "There is no easy button we can press to make the world green."

Given the magnitude of the changes needed, it can be unclear what impact individual actions can have. For an example of the large-scale cumulative effects of individual actions, let's look at bottled water. In the 1970s, "bottled water" meant a water-filled thermos. Three decades later, billions of dollars flow through the bottled water industry.

"In 2006, the equivalent of 2 billion half-liter bottles of water were shipped to U.S. ports. ... Only about 13 percent of the bottles we use get recycled. In 2005, 2 million tons of plastic water bottles ended up clogging landfills instead of getting recycled," according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Relatively simple measures by individuals can have a positive impact and contribute directly to a healthier people and planet. The challenge is that what "green" is can be elusive. For example, organic T-shirts are popular. But what is the balance of effect if those are made under unfair trade standards and shipped from overseas creating emissions and fossil fuel consumption?

The answers are not simple.

JMU's environmental stewardship effort specifically focuses on environmental literacy, critical thinking and personal behavior change. We strive to be "eco-WISE:" wary, investigative and scientific in our approach, and environmental stewards in our actions. Individual actions, like those below, support large-scale, fundamental changes that are needed to ensure a sustainable future. 

WAYS YOU CAN BE JMU ECO-WISE:

- Conserve energy. Manage your energy use by turning off and unplugging small appliances, upgrade heating and cooling systems, change the thermostat a few degrees, seal and insulate your home, and consider renewable energy systems. Take advantage of energy tax-credits.
- Preserve natural resources, including water and ecosystems. Practice water conservation. Minimize chemical use, especially in your yard. Compost food and yard waste.
- Buy locally produced products. Purchase foods from local farms. Consider the life cycle of manufactured products, including production, transportation and disposal effects.
- Minimize materials consumption and effects. Practice the five R's: rethink, repair, reduce, reuse and recycle. Use reusable items versus disposables.
- Walk or bicycle; use public transit or carpool. Purchase a fuel-efficient vehicle.
- Challenge yourself and others to learn more at www.jmu.edu/stewardship/involved.html.

* Members of the Institute for Stewardship of the Natural World Executive Council contributed to this article: Jerry Benson, Randy Mitchell, Mack Moore, Towana Moore and Susan Wheeler.

HARTMAN: ... and I said, "How has this changed your behavior?" Our volunteers reported their roommates were now recycling and minimizing waste. The experience really affected the other people our students come in contact with. They talked about how they shared their trash sort experience at the family Thanksgiving dinner and got their family members to participate.

BOLGIANO: That leads naturally into a discussion about food, which is one of society's greatest energy expenditures. How does the institute approach food issues?

HARTMAN: One of the successes at JMU is the environmental efforts of our dining services. The waste oil is converted into biodiesel fuel. Dining services went tray-less the beginning of this year to save wash water and energy. JMU is looking at composting and several of the dining halls already have pulpers, but unlike the composting I do in my backyard, this is a large endeavor for a campus to compost all its food waste. So we're probably looking at a model similar to what they're doing with the waste oil, which is an external company processing it.

THOMAS: I really love the stickers in the dining halls that say, "The oil used to fry your food will be made into biodiesel." It's cool to hear people talking about it in line.

HARTMAN: One of the most interesting dining advances this year was a farmer's market on campus once each semester. The dining hall already buys 200 locally grown products. Also, the new east campus dining hall is our first LEED-certified building [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design green building rating system].

THOMAS: I use the campus farmer's market and really enjoy the fresh fruits and vegetables. Learning about sustainability has definitely made me stop and think. If I have a choice between two different oranges, I'm going to pick the oranges grown a little bit closer rather than down in South America.

BOLGIANO: Reducing energy use — like eating local foods instead of those transported long distances — has become a major national strategy. How does the institute approach this issue?

HARTMAN: We will recommend targets, establish benchmarks and work closely with facilities management staff, who have historically been progressive, to implement specific actions. Facilities management already mulches and reuses about 90 percent of campus plant material; very rarely does it get bagged up to leave campus. There are timers on many lights, and they have low-energy lighting.

One of the most interesting new things JMU has installed is a Web-based system

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