

# Responsively Yours: Green is More Than the “New Black”



Do you remember hearing: “pink is the new black”? The phrase suggested pink was the color to wear everyday or with every outfit — the necessary fashion accessory, even for people who might avoid the color pink as having suspiciously girly connotations. Then, what do you know? Brown was the new black. The restless fashion fad moved on leaving a strip of pink flotsam like the high tide mark on a beach.

Right now, green is like that. We have green energy, green paper, green products and green market bags. Thank God for this resurgence in interest in the environment. We need more of it, not less. More solar panels and wind farms and recycling, more attention to how and where our products are made, and what is recycled and what is not. The instruction to “reduce, reuse, recycle” should be the basis of energy audits, strategic plans and three-point sermons for the foreseeable future as we begin to assess the results of industrialization, over-farming and wanton use of natural resources.

My worry is that we are reacting to this trend as we react to many other trends — more like a calorie reduction diet than a change of lifestyle. We know diets don’t work. We manage for a time, but unless we change our activity level and our eating habits, we can’t maintain the weight loss. We also know losing and regaining weight (the yo-yo effect) puts additional strain on the body. We saw this in the first environmental movement and energy crisis (remember the ecology flag anyone?) when we reduced speed limits, took lead out of gasoline and additives out of our laundry detergents that were harming water quality.

Removing lead from gasoline, passing the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Superfund legislation were significant achievements. However, did we make a permanent change in driving patterns or our investment in waste water collection systems? Unfortunately, we did not. Instead, we gradually increased the size and weight of our cars and trucks, and let the speed limits slide back up. We still live in municipalities across the country where waste water and storm water are mixed — even if only during irregular high flood events.

This adds to the cost and risk of digging out after storms and continues to poison our soil as well as the insects, fish and birds that depend on the water. I read recently President Jimmy Carter had solar panels installed on the roof of the White House and President Ronald Regan had them removed. While both actions were more symbolic than substantive in terms of the country’s total energy consumption, they also demonstrate the yo-yo effect.

So how can we make green a permanent part of our lifestyle? Can we walk more and drive less, eat locally produced food that is less processed, and use green criteria in our purchasing? What would we do to reduce national energy consumption if every member

of United Methodist Women had an energy audit of her home and invested in energysaving improvements? What if we plant native plants in our yards that do not require watering during warm months or learn to use natural fertilizers and insect repellants to reduce the enriching of our storm water that feeds algae blooms earlier and earlier every summer? What if we agree to bring a proposal for doing the same to the agenda of every local church board of trustees in the New Year?

The possibilities are many and appear at every level. Can we support local recycling efforts? Can our municipal construction projects meet as many LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) criteria as possible? Can we support design standards that include sidewalks and other aspects of pedestrian traffic in local planning and zoning codes?

What about asking our Congressional representatives to pass the Clean Water Restoration Act of 2007 (S.1870/H.R.2421) to protect the nation's water supplies? What action can you take to support state and local green legislation? Right now, state governments are banding together to address common problems of acid rain in the northeast and exhaust-generated smog in the west.

The United States had a chance to make an international commitment to this effort in the Kyoto process. Though 181 other countries around the world have acceded to the Kyoto Protocol and it became effective in 2005, we deemed it to be against our national interest. The process calls for a new instrument of international commitment in 2012. God willing, we will each have made green adjustments in our lifestyle by then. It's more than a fashion statement, it's a faith statement — God has made us stewards of the earth. May we be found to be faithful.



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