

# Go Green to Fight The Crunch

David Tusing

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Greenpeace.org

Tomorrow, as millions around the world observe Earth Hour and switch off power for 60 minutes, the spotlight will be on conservation. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-endorsed event, which will see individuals and organisations turn off all non-essential lights and electrical appliances at 8:30pm, will hope to raise awareness and promote the need to take action on climate change.

In the UAE, where residents spend a majority of their time indoors, thanks to high temperatures much of the year, the interior design fraternity is also urging people to become more "sustainable" oriented.

Green interiors, they say, have long-term financial and wellbeing benefits, and the return is a lot higher than is common knowledge.

"Besides the tangible factors where you can save on energy bills, there is the welfare element. You tend to have better interior air quality, which leads to healthier, more productive residents," says Craig Wora, a senior designer at leading hospitality interior design consultant Hirsch Bedner Associates.

"Being green does not mean spending more. Materials might be slightly more expensive, but the benefit you get and the return in investment is much higher."

Ilike Toklu, the managing director of interior store Elegan Art, says that while the green agenda is being successfully promoted by her industry, current trends are also forcing people to think about sustainability in much broader terms.

"It's a natural progression that is accelerated by the current state of our times," she says. "People around the world are becoming more aware of environmental issues and their repercussions on society as well as on individual well being for a variety of reasons. For instance, global population growth and increased demand has moved the furniture and design industries towards mass production, requiring synthetic materials. Usage of natural or organic resources in combination with hand-made production then became rare and expensive. So limitations are a great source of inspiration."

Thomas Lundgren, the founder and CEO of popular furniture store THE One says while his company has a long way to go in limiting its environmental impact, it has already taken steps.

"If one sources from all over the world, one should be committed to helping protect it," he says.

"We have started by only dealing with manufacturers who can commit themselves to not using wood from the rain forests. In addition, we have introduced three eco-friendly towelling ranges made from bamboo, certified organic cotton and micro-cotton that are gentler on the earth. We are also currently testing 100 per cent degradable plastic shopping bags."

But according to Sunil Gudur, chief manager of Al Gurg Paints, a Sharjah-based company that manufactures and distributes well-known paint brands such as Leigh's and Dulux, there will have to be a trade-off between low cost and environmentally friendly products.

"From a pure marketing point of view, it is all very good. But if it is not making my products cost effective, then I still have a lot of work to do," he says. "I don't think environmental issues have a phenomenal bearing right now on companies since everyone wants to cut costs."

Transformations are however taking place, albeit slowly, adds the official.

"For instance, there are nearly 100 ingredients that go into making a paint. The formulations are not being reengineered but replacements of toxic raw materials are taking place," he says.

"It is very important from a substitution point of view because if tomorrow the UAE Government comes and says this coating needs to be made to such and such standards or criteria, it changes the entire working of the industry. So from that point of view, it is critical."

According to a study published last year by the Environmental Information Administration in the US, electricity consumption, at 72 per cent, had the highest impact on resources in the country, while buildings contributed to the highest level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, followed by automobiles and industry.

Interior design is therefore moving beyond just form and function, incorporating sustainability, says designer Wora. "The return that you get from incorporating sustainable features reflects in your energy use," he says.

"Being green reflects in your welfare. So in the long run you gain."

## **1 Use efficient lighting**

Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents (CFLs). Compact fluorescents use four times less energy, and last eight times longer. For example, a typical 75W incandescent bulb will be replaced by an 18W compact fluorescent. The compact fluorescent will be more expensive to buy, but you will need to replace it eight times less often and it will use less electricity, which often makes it the biggest electricity saver in your house.

You can start by replacing the bulbs in all lamps that are used for 30 minutes a day or more.

Also pay attention to the light fixtures. Clever use of reflectors, and directional lamps to get the

light where you need it can save you another 50 per cent energy cost and improve your comfort.

## **2 Use a water-saving shower head**

The water-saving shower head delivers high comfort for only half of the water use (5-7 litres/min. Instead of 10-18 litres/min.).

Hot water is the second most important area of energy use in a household, after space heating, and thus needs extra attention.

An efficient shower head can save almost 1,500 kWh electricity/y if an electric boiler is used, or 1,900 kWh heat if a gas or oil boiler/geyser is used.

All this for just a few dirhams extra when you buy the showerhead. Over its lifetime of 10 years, a showerhead will also save some 70,000 litres of water.

## **3 Washing with care**

Buy a high-efficiency model with a power consumption of less than 0.9 kWh/washing cycle.

Consider a 'hot fill' model, which connects directly to your efficient gas-fired water heater.

Using gas to heat the water almost halves electricity consumption. Installing a hot fill appliance needs to be done correctly, so good advice is required. Check the energy label.

The EU A+/A/A label will guarantee you the best energy efficiency and washing and drying result. If using a clothes dryer, make sure that your washing machine can spin at 1,600 or even 1,800 rpm. The most efficient washing machines save some 1,500 litres of water per year – a double gain.

## **4 Invest in proper refrigeration**

Buy a high efficiency refrigerator that consumes around 100 kWh/y. This is 10 times less than the average in the US, and four times less than the EU average. Remarkably, energy consumption by the most efficient refrigerator models is largely unrelated to their size. The most efficient 400-litre fridge on the market today only consumes 106kWh/y. These efficient refrigerators are about 5-15 per cent more expensive to buy, but will save you loads of money and energy in use. In general, they are also high quality products that will last longer, will need less repairing and make less noise.

Avoid refrigerators with a built-in frozen food compartment, if you have a separate freezer. These models are less efficient and you lose cooling space.

## **5 Buy efficient electric appliances**

They use two to 10 times less electricity for the same functionality, and are mostly higher quality products that last longer. In short, efficient appliances save you lots of energy and money. In many countries, efficiency rating labels are mandatory on most appliances. In the EU, models are labelled A++ for the most efficient, then A+, A, B, C, D for subsequently less efficient models. Look for the A++ or A+ models. In the US, the Energy Star label is used.

## **6 Check your computers**

Buy a laptop instead of a desktop, if practical. It consumes five times less electricity. If you buy a desktop, get an LCD screen instead of an outdated CRT.

Enable the power management function on your computer, the screensaver does not save energy. Switching off a computer extends its lifetime, contrary to some misconceptions. Leaving a computer running the whole year will cost you more than 1,000 kWh/y, or almost as much as the total electricity consumption of a high-efficiency household appliance. Use one large power strip for your computer, broadband modem, scanner, printer, monitor, and speakers.

## **7 Cut off standby losses**

Most modern electric appliances consume electricity even when turned off. For TVs, VCRs, faxes, HiFis, computer screens, cable boxes, and broadband modems this is on average some 40 – 120 kWh/y. In total, household losses can reach several hundreds kWhs/y, all for doing nothing useful.

The best solution is to buy appliances that have a very low standby energy consumption. Standby power consumption is mentioned in the product manual and can be checked before buying. Or you can look for it on specialised websites (see links). For most appliances, it should be around 0.5 – 1 watts/hour. Keep in mind that the cost of wasted standby energy over a model's lifetime can be higher than the cost of buying it! A power strip is good way to cut VCR, TV and DVD-player stand-by losses.

*(Tips from Greenpeace.org)*