

Sierra Club

Sustainable Consumption Committee

Introductory Newsletter: 99 percent

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The Sustainable Consumption Committee

Human over-consumption and environmentally damaging consumption of natural resources is a central factor in environmental problems around the world. The Sierra Club has adopted a policy of encouraging environmentally responsible consumption and has tasked the Sustainable Consumption Committee (SCC) with educating Americans about the links between individual, household, and institutional consumption and environmental harm, and to provide practical examples of how to consume more responsibly.

The SCC currently focuses on three areas where consumption particularly damages the environment: energy use; food, agriculture and water; and forest products. The committee's priorities are to educate environmental activists and others about consumption issues, to work with other Sierra Club programs and campaigns, and to provide support for club activists working on consumption issues in their local communities. We also work closely with other organizations concerned about the link between consumption and environmental harm.

Green Simplicity

A cure for people – and an environment – under stress

What if we told you that you could spread environmentalism among people who are so stressed by everyday life that they've given up? Or that you could turn that stress into personal fulfillment and a hope for saving nature? Would you wonder if we were kidding?

Yet such an approach not only exists, it's become one of the hottest trends of the last decade. It's called Voluntary Simplicity. There's a whole country out there full of people who are just sick of the rat-race involved in keeping up with the neighbors – a nation of people ready to live more gently on the planet while at the same time thinking for themselves.

Thinking for ourselves is the key to the simplicity movement - living deliberately so that our actions line up better with our values (however we define them). Reclaiming our lives from Madison Avenue and finding our true passions doesn't mean self-deprivation or living in the woods (unless you want to). Newcomers often arrive at our meetings worrying, "What can I give up?," and leave thinking, "What can I reclaim?" We're not talking about emptying out but filling up – filling up, that is, on whatever has deep meaning for us. Simplifying our lives has other advantages as well. When we 'lighten up,' it creates stronger community spirit, encourages volunteerism, fosters healthy children raised in healthier families, counters the current flow of the world's wealth from the poor to the rich, and just so happens to be terrific for the environment.

We hope you're intrigued. The Angeles Chapter recently teamed up with Seeds of Simplicity to bring this process to the Sierra Club in the form of "Environmental Simplicity Circles" (Seeds of Simplicity is a national, nonprofit membership organization for the public focused on voluntary simplicity). The circles are meeting in regional groups around the Angeles Chapter.

Here are some things a local environmental simplicity circle can give you:

- Tools to free yourself from America's excess commercialism
- Personal empowerment

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Northwest Earth Institute

NWEI discussion classes available!

The SCC has been granted permission to use the following information, available on the Northwest Earth Institute Website (www.nwei.org):

NWIE Discussion Courses Overview

NWEI discussion courses provide an enjoyable, supportive setting in which to examine personal values and habits, engage in stimulating discussion, and make personal changes if desired. Since 1993, tens of thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations have been involved in NWEI courses.

Courses consist of 7 to 12 people who meet weekly for about an hour to discuss readings from a course book. Course books, each about 100 to 150 pages in length, contain a diverse collection of essays, articles, and book excerpts organized around weekly themes to create lively discussion. Discussion questions and a suggested meeting format are included as well.

- [Voluntary Simplicity](#), an eight-session course addressing the distractions of modern society that keep us from caring for ourselves, our relationships, and our environment.
- [Exploring Deep Ecology](#), a nine-session course addressing core values and how they affect the way we view and treat the earth.
- [Discovering a Sense of Place](#), formerly called Bioregional Perspectives, a nine-session course focusing on knowing and protecting our place.
- [Choices for Sustainable Living](#), a nine-session course exploring the meaning of sustainable living and the ties between lifestyle choices and their impact on the earth.

Each meeting consists of two parts: an opening and a facilitated discussion. Except for the first meeting, sessions are opened and facilitated by members of the group on a rotating basis. This structured, yet non-didactic, format encourages a process which:

- Establishes trust, respect, and a sense of community among group members.
- Allows participants to seek personal clarity without group consensus.
- Creates a supportive environment for personal change.

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Coming Soon: True Cost of Food Campaign

U.S. consumption levels have become the world's role model. U.S. eating patterns, if adopted by the world's people, will result in grave ecological consequences. In response, the SCC is launching our first major activist campaign in early 2004. We'll build grassroots support to encourage markets to carry more 'low-impact foods,' especially organic and locally-grown. We'll accompany this campaign with a major educational effort that features the sustainable food ethic necessary to save both people's health and the planet's health:

- 1) Eating low on the food chain.
- 2) Eating organic.
- 3) Eating locally grown food, when possible.

Find out all about it in the upcoming Campaign Launch Issue, due out in late February.

The Sustainability Pledge

Each of us can help reduce our footprint on the earth.

So What's With The Newsletter Title?

99 percent of material used in production of, or contained within, goods in the United States becomes waste within six weeks of sale. Want to find out more? Check out our website.

The quiet voice of the individual booms when combined with many. With this in mind, the SCC asks you to make a small commitment to a sustainable society that, combined with the commitment of others, will create a huge impact. Just cut out this handy personal pledge form and choose the promises you feel you can make. They range from simple changes in daily activities to major lifestyle choice. Add more promises when you feel you can. Pass the pledge along to friends, family, and co-workers - the more that participate, the larger the impact!

-By Rashel Merenes and Michael Beck

The Sustainability Pledge

FOOD

- ◇ Eat less meat (eat meat ____ times a week).
- ◇ Buy organic.
- ◇ Buy locally grown (farmers market or co-op).
- ◇ Buy in bulk (to cut down on packaging).
- ◇ Give my kids a thermos instead of individual juice boxes.

TRANSPORTATION

- ◇ When practical, bike/walk/use public transit.
- ◇ Carpool.
- ◇ Keep my car at least 10 years (unless it's a gas guzzler).
- ◇ Plan ahead to consolidate driving trips.

HOUSEHOLD/OFFICE

- ◇ Repair appliances before replacing.
- ◇ Buy reusable, not disposable, products (batteries, dinnerware, etc.).
- ◇ Buy energy efficient appliances and fixtures (look for Energy Star).
- ◇ Use biodegradable cleansers.
- ◇ Bring a reusable sack to the store.
- ◇ Get off junk mail lists (<http://www.newdream.org/junkmail/index.html>).
- ◇ Recycle glass, plastic, paper, etc.
- ◇ Use the back sides of paper.
- ◇ Put on lighter clothing, open windows, and use fans instead of an air conditioner.
- ◇ Wear a sweater instead of turning up the heat.

WATER

- ◇ Fix leaks around the house.
- ◇ Put an empty bottle in the toilet tank to conserve water or install a low-flow toilet.
- ◇ Don't let water run when it's not being used.
- ◇ Take shorter showers.
- ◇ Use drip irrigation systems.
- ◇ Fill up the sink to do dishes instead of using the tap.
- ◇ Only run the dishwasher or clothes washer when they're full.
- ◇ Landscape with native or drought-tolerant plants (xeriscaping).
- ◇ Use a Water Calculator to water my lawn the right amount (<http://www.mwd.dst.ca.us/mwdh2o/pages/conserv/landcalc/landcalc01.html>).
- ◇ Drink filtered tap water instead of buying bottled water.

COMMUNITY:

- ◇ Shop at a locally-owned store (to keep my local economy healthy).
- ◇ Borrow/lend infrequently-used tools and appliances instead of buying my own.

EDUCATION:

- ◇ Educate myself on the impacts of my lifestyle.
- ◇ Talk to others about lifestyle choices and share this pledge.
- ◇ Consider if I really need something before buying it.
- ◇ Pay attention to how advertisers create desires.
- ◇ Do at least one action a week (write a letter to the editor, call my representative, etc.) objecting to a new attempt to abuse natural resources.

TAKE IT FURTHER:

- ◇ Own a hybrid or electric vehicle.
- ◇ Live close to work.
- ◇ Get off the electricity grid by installing solar panels.
- ◇ Become vegetarian or vegan.

Green Simplicity

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- Tips and brainstorming on reducing time stress
- A community of like-minded environmentalists
- Enjoyment and laughter built into the process

We keep the circles small (six to eight people) so that each participant feels involved. These groups are the ultimate democracy, picking topics and meeting dates (frequently once a month) as they see fit. An ethic of mutual validation guides the groups as the participants come to grips with a society that stresses stuff over people and Madison Avenue-conformity over individual fulfillment. However, you won't find any preaching about "right answers" here. The groups focus instead on empowering each person to develop a unique approach to personal fulfillment and environmental harmony.

The biggest concern we hear from ethical, ecologically-minded people is how overwhelmed they feel by the size of the problem. They'd love to do something, if they only knew where to begin or how to find the time. These are the potential activists that the Club never sees; they feel blocked from the start. But here's a new tool your local Chapter or Group can use to ease them into a sense of empowerment. Folks who have participated in a simplicity circle often emerge with a sense of greater control over their lives. They feel less subject to the "time famine" that comes from their workplaces and consumption-crazed neighbors. They find they can choose to devote more time to their true values – not just environmentalism, but also family, friends, spiritual development, hobbies, and nature. And these are the people who make the best activists.

Please don't hesitate to find out more about environmental simplicity circles, or about how they support the Club's long-term goal of sustainable consumption – contact Michael Beck at michaelbecksc@yahoo.com. For information on Seeds of Simplicity and the simplicity movement in general, call Carol Holst at the 24-hour phone number, 1-877-UNSTUFF, or check out www.seedsofsimplicity.org and www.truegoods.com.

- By Michael Beck and Carol Holst

Northwest Earth Institute

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Course offerings and formats vary a bit in different parts of North America. For more information on how to start a course in your area, click your region:

- [Portland, Oregon](#)
- [Northwest Communities \(Oregon, Washington, Idaho\)](#)
- [Outside the Northwest: National Earth Institute Network](#)

Forming a Discussion Group

Our four discussion courses, [Exploring Deep Ecology](#), [Voluntary Simplicity](#), [Choices for Sustainable Living](#), and [Discovering a Sense of Place](#) are available to groups outside the Northwest. If you are interested in forming a discussion group, and there is not an established [earth institute](#) in your area, you can become a local organizer. Local organizers test one course and then determine if the test group would like to offer the courses to others in their community. NWEI will provide the course books at a nominal cost. Just take the following steps:

- 1) Contact NWEI at (503) 227-2807 and speak with the National Outreach Coordinator. NWEI will provide you with information on how to organize a discussion group and an order form for the course books.
- 2) Form a group of 7 to 12 people to take the course, or form more than one group. The National Outreach staff can help you with ideas for organizing a group in your home, workplace, center of faith, or any community space.
- 3) Share information about the course with your group at a preliminary meeting. At the meeting, determine who would like to take the course.
- 4) Order the course books from NWEI. NWEI will ship them to you, along with a *Local Organizer's Guide* to help you facilitate your group. As the organizer, you will be a participant as well as the "mentor" for the first session. In locations near an earth institute, a mentor is a volunteer who agrees to attend the first session to introduce the course.

Visit the SCC online:

http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption