Save energy, save the environment

Although it may not be obvious, there's a direct connection between your energy use and the environment. When you consume less power, you reduce the amount of toxic fumes released by power plants, conserve the earth's natural resources and protect ecosystems from destruction. By taking steps to reduce your energy intake, you'll contribute to a healthier and happier world.

Protect the air and prevent climate change

Perhaps the most notable way that reducing energy helps the environment is by decreasing power plant emissions. To generate electricity, most power plants burn coal, crude oil or other fossil fuels. Although this method of creating energy is relatively inexpensive, our planet pays the price – carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides are just a few of the byproducts that come from traditional methods of power generation.

Carbon dioxide, which accounts for the majority of all airborne pollution, is a greenhouse gas. When carbon dioxide is released into the air, it absorbs the sun's warmth and keeps heat in our atmosphere. This "greenhouse effect" is a natural phenomenon, and it's necessary for survival on earth. However, as power plants burn more fuel to create more energy, the extra carbon waste traps too much heat. This can have a detrimental impact on our land and our lives. Effects of greenhouse gas emissions include:

* Rising temperatures, heat waves and drought
* Higher sea levels
* Abnormal weather patterns
* Increased intensity of natural disasters
* Smog and acid rain

Cutting back on energy consumption reduces the amount of electricity that power plants have to make, subsequently reducing the amount of fossil fuels that are burned each day. Even a small change can make a tremendous difference – if every American household traded in just one incandescent light bulb for an efficient CFL, the reduction in pollution would be equivalent to [taking 1.3 million cars off the road](http://www.fastcompany.com/57676/how-many-lightbulbs-does-it-take-change-world-one-and-youre-looking-it).

Conserve limited natural resources

When you opt to cut back on energy use, you also help conserve limited natural resources that would otherwise be used to power the power plants. Less demand for energy creates less demand for harvesting fossil fuels. Turning off the lights at night or washing clothes in cold water can save trees, coal, natural gas and more. From an economic standpoint, it's critical to conserve our finite resources. As fossil fuels become increasingly scarce, they will become extremely expensive.

Save ecosystems and animals

In addition to impacting climate patterns and depleting stores of natural resources, excessive energy use can harm animals and ecosystems. Mining, logging and material extraction associated with the provision of fossil fuels destroys habitats on land and in the ocean. Human-induced air pollution is one of the main reasons that biodiversity is disappearing at [1,000 times the normal extinction rate](https://www.iucn.org/iyb/about/biodiversity_crisis/).

Oil spills, which often occur during the transport of fossil fuels, wreak havoc on underwater species and throw of the chemical balance of our oceans, making it [dangerous for humans to swim](http://news.discovery.com/human/health/crude-oil-harms-humans.htm).

Although the EPA has set regulations to reduce chemical dumping, the toxic waste created by power plants hasn't disappeared. Coal-fired power plants are reportedly the largest source of toxic water pollution in the U.S. Each year, these energy plants discharge billions of tons of poisonous waste, often containing arsenic, mercury and lead.

Consume less, conserve more

Reducing electricity use in your home – or going off the power grid with [solar energy](https://www.saveonenergy.com/green-energy/is-a-solar-power-system-right-for-your-home/) –can benefit the environment, conserve resources and save lives. Although your own energy saving adjustments may seem inconsequential, small steps become great leaps when multiplied by 7 billion.