
Opinion

Sustainable Marblehead: Five Green Ideas for the New Year

By Petra Langer

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They say that if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. In this case, the problem is the trashing of our planet which can be stopped if each and every one of us commits to changing certain practices and habits. Here are five:

1. Walk more, drive less. We know it's winter and it's cold outside, but each time you drive your car, you're generating carbon pollution. In fact, in Marblehead, more than a quarter of our total greenhouse gas emissions come from the cars we drive, according to Sustainable Marblehead's Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report (www.sustainablemarblehead.org/ghg-report). Instead, bundle up, put on a hat, and get out there either by yourself or with your significant other, a friend, or your favorite furry companion. You'll avoid cabin fever and burn off all that weight you promised to lose after the holidays. Also, doesn't it just make more sense to walk two miles rather than driving to the gym to walk two miles?

2. Don't idle your car, especially while you're waiting to pick up your children at school. You might have noticed those new "no idling" signs on school properties. They're there for a reason. In addition to creating more carbon pollution and being against the law, car exhaust from idling is more harmful to children because they breathe 50% more air per pound than adults do and they're closer to the ground. For children with asthma, car exhaust can make their symptoms worse. So, when you get in line to pick up your child at school, please turn off your engine.

3. Shop local. It goes without saying that supporting our local merchants is good for our local economy and keeps Marblehead a vibrant community. It's also good for the environment. If you can get what you need here in town, you won't be

wasting energy by driving to the mall or generating more boxes and packaging that our Health Department has to recycle or pay to be hauled away. If you can walk or bike to shop, that's even better!

4. Compost your food scraps and more. According to our health director, Andrew Petty, the most important thing we can do to reduce our waste costs is to compost. You can either compost your food scraps in your backyard, bring them to the Transfer Station and put them in the Black Earth bins by the exit, or sign up for weekly curbside pickup through Black Earth Compost (www.blackearthcompost.com). Now that more than 300 households have signed up for curbside pickup, the cost has been cut in half to \$99/year, and you get two big bags of compost for your garden in the spring. Plus, Black Earth will take meat and bones, seafood and shells, soiled paper and cardboard (including pizza boxes), compostable bags and containers, wine corks, and much more. So, please don't put these items in your disposal or throw them in the trash. Consider composting them instead. Composting 1 pound of food waste diverts 3.8 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions from going into the atmosphere!

5. Consider buying or leasing an electric car. Check out Marblehead Electric's electric vehicle incentives and free Level 2 residential electric chargers when you sign up for their scheduled charging program (www.marbleheadelectric.com/ev-vehicles-chargers.html). Plus, the state has announced that it will extend its rebate program into 2019. Nissan is currently offering Leaf leases at \$199 a month, with \$2,500 cash back. There are details, of course, but it's the cheapest we've seen. The Leaf has a 150-mile range, which is plenty for local travel, and the Hyundai Kona is coming to Massachusetts soon, and it's got virtually the same range as the Tesla 3 (258 miles vs. 264).

Thanks for making this a green new year!

Petra Langer is executive director of Sustainable Marblehead, a nonprofit citizens organization working to protect the environment and address climate change on a local level.