

Go Green for 2010! (published 1/1/10)

by Jim Evetts, Director of Charlotte County Building Construction Services

New Year is historically the time to commit to change; we make resolutions to eat less, spend less and exercise more. If you're anything like me, my resolution typically lasts two weeks and is quickly forgotten until next year. Research shows that only 12% of New Year's Resolutions are successfully adhered to. So this year, why not make a resolution that saves you money and helps the environment—make a resolution to go green!

Whether or not you believe in climate change, global warming or rising sea levels, there is very little debate about the ever increasing cost of heating and cooling your home, driving your car and watering your yard. Imagine if there were things that you could do, for very little money, that would reduce your costs AND help the environment.

I am in construction and I hear much discussion about the high cost of "Going Green." Installing rooftop solar photovoltaic and solar water heater systems are expensive. You will see a return on investment, but that initial outlay is hard to swallow. As Charlotte County moves through the next year, we are working at bringing those costs down for you—but what can you do in the meantime?

There are lots of ways for you to decrease your energy, gas and water consumption in your home and business, without spending a lot of money. For example, look at your current water usage—there may be places you are losing water and don't know it. Even a small leak can waste up to 300 gallons per month. Start by checking your garden hose bibs, swimming pool connections, irrigation systems, faucets and toilets.

Seal up your house—gaps below doors and around windows let the heat in and the cold out making it more expensive to cool your home. Make sure rubber seals are not deteriorated and that doors and windows fit securely. Also make sure you keep windows and doors closed when you are heating or cooling your home.

Seal around your electrical outlets—one of the biggest heat exchanges from the house to the attic comes from poorly fitting outlet covers. Inexpensive seals can be purchased that fit between the outlet cover and the wall sealing the gap and reducing your energy costs.

Plant more trees: Trees and shrubbery planted in front of south-facing windows reduce the amount of light (and therefore heat) coming into the house. The less heat coming in, the less your air conditioner has to work. Plant Florida native shrubs and trees that don't require much water and use a rain barrel to collect rainwater to give them what they do need.

Car Pool—try and share the cost of going to the shops, dropping the kids off at school, or going to work by car pooling with friends. Even short shared journeys will reduce your costs. Ask your employer about setting up a car pool scheme or visit the Florida DOT's Commuter Services website at www.commuterservicesfl.com for more ideas.

This is just a small snapshot of things that can help you save money and be kinder to the environment. There is much more that you can do. Charlotte County's website has many more ideas and tips on the Building Construction Services page and throughout the County's other departments and we are always looking for new ideas and suggestions. So please, help yourself and help the environment.

Have a happy and prosperous 2010.