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Carbonhoggin' at Christmas

Selflessness and generosity have always been at the heart of the winter season in the form of family tradition and charitable effort. However, we often unconsciously commit selfish acts through excessive energy and resource consumption that contributes to climate change and damages global wellbeing during the holidays. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the average amount of household waste increases from 4.5 pounds to 6 pounds per day. Every pound of solid waste that goes to the landfill generates two pounds of greenhouse gas. And the cost the cost of goods we purchase is greater than the price tag we see: Extraction of raw materials, manufacturing and transportation all emit greenhouse gas that we don't hold ourselves accountable for.

During cold weather, we idle our cars to keep warm in lines, stand a little longer in the hot shower after a grueling shopping day, and set our thermostats a little higher than is necessary. It all adds up.

People in the northwest typically emit 1000 pounds of carbon each winter heating their homes. Even those of us with electric heat should keep in mind that 45% of our power comes from burning coal or natural gas.

This month world leaders are congregating in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the United Nations Climate Conference with the goal of negotiating a treaty to stabilize the amount of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere at a level that stops man-made climate change. Stabilization will occur through sustainable social and economic development and will allow ecosystems to adapt without collapsing. Follow the Conference on the web at <http://en.cop15.dk/>

Last Saturday, candlelight vigils around the world, including two here in Skagit County, showed solidarity with the citizens of the nations whose very survival is threatened by the disastrous effects of global climate change—loss of life, economic disruption, and population dislocation.

Honoring those affected by hardships like these remind us that climate change is an enduring concern for everyone. Moreover, it could happen to you. For more information on the basics of climate change, check your public library for the second edition of, *The Rough Guide to Climate Change: The Symptoms, The Science, The Solutions* by Robert Henson.

Locally, after nearly a year of work by staff and the Climate Action and Sustainability Taskforce, Skagit County released a draft for public comment of its 2010 Climate Action Plan. When fully implemented, the County estimates it will save almost \$150,000 a year while reducing operational greenhouse gas emissions and promoting energy conservation and waste reduction among the public at large. View the public draft online at www.skagitcounty.net/sustainability

Also here at home, the Skagit Cool Communities Campaign is helping Skagit County residents reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by increasing household energy efficiency, increasing fuel efficiency and reducing solid waste. Participants are gathering in small support groups to practice the greenhouse gas reduction techniques they have learned while following the workbook, *Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds*. Pick one up at the Skagit County Commissioner's building on Continental Place in Mount Vernon.

With holiday goodwill, we can support the work in Copenhagen by trimming our own carbonhoggin'. Go ahead, turn down the heat and throw on that ugly sweater you got from Aunt Emmy last Christmas. If you turn on the lights, are they LED or compact fluorescents? Ask Santa

for an earth-smart auto, power-sipping LCD TV instead of a power-hungry plasma TV. If you've been extra nice, ask for a new front-loading washing machine that saves both electricity and water. You might choose not to consume at all, be happy with what you have, and take a walk with a friend in the snow. Buy local by bus or bicycle. Get elves to find and seal all the air leaks in your home. Carpool to the Christmas party and you can drink as much eggnog as you want. Be sure recycling and food waste composting are happening at your event. Plant your living Christmas tree come New Years Day. Take a deep breath and remember how lucky you are.

Celebrating the season as an energy hog certainly has never been anyone's intention. However, knowing the cost that daily energy consumption has on our environment gives us a chance to take conscience steps to conserve. Greet the challenging issues of climate change with courage; react with hope. Encourage others through your actions. The impact of your positive attitude during this time of global uncertainty has more potential to influence change than facts, money or education. These acts of generosity for the planet are like the holiday spirit, they are meant to last all year!