



Swim for the River

THINGS WE CAN DO

Getting involved

Often when people read an article or watch a television program about environmental disaster they feel helpless. What difference can one person make? The answer is: more than you think!

Included in the *Swim for the River* DVD and on the Web site is the Directory of Hudson River Environmental Organizations. It lists 50 national, state and local organizations that are working on environmental issues that affect the Hudson River Valley. Use the directory to contact a group in your area. Find out what they are doing and how you can help.

Even without joining an organization there is a lot you can do. Consider the end of the documentary film *Swim for the River*: There's a scene in which people make a symbolic gesture, signifying a pledge of action on behalf of the environment, by pouring a cup of white sand onto a gigantic scale. The scale was inspired by John Cronin, who spent thirty years building legal cases against major polluters. Interviewed in the DVD extra *Tipping Point*, Cronin tells us:

The language that we've used over the past thirty years about the Hudson River and its problems has been the language of war, "good guys" versus "bad guys."

Now we have to appeal to a higher sensibility ... of changing hearts and minds, of slowly coming to that tipping point where public opinion slides so far in one direction, there is no place else to go but in that direction. Because the things that needs correcting are not just the things that are done by bad guys. The things that need correcting, a lot of them, are things done by all of us, every day.

We built the scales on the bank of the Hudson River at Croton Point. Next to the scales we placed a large banner inviting people to participate. It asked people to make a pledge to do at least one thing, one personal action, for the environment. To signify their pledge they put a cupful of white sand on the balance. It was obvious that a single action, a single cupful would not tip the scales. But in just a few hours more than 400 people made their contribution and the scales tipped.

Following is a list of some things people pledged to do that you can do too. Nothing is too small to make a difference.

TWENTY TIPS

Tip the Scales for a Cleaner River and a Greener World

1. **Slow the pace of your life.** Our hurry-up, multi-tasking lifestyles take a toll on our emotions and actions, causing unnecessary stress, thoughtless consumption, speeding cars, and erratic, poorly considered choices. Leave a cushion of time to arrive early at appointments.
2. **Walk, bike or take public transportation** whenever, wherever you can.
3. **If you must drive, increase fuel efficiency** by driving more slowly, maintaining air pressure on your tires, carpooling whenever possible and bundling your errands. Drive the most fuel-efficient vehicle you can. If you're in the new car market, think hybrid.
4. **Be a thoughtful consumer** by posing the following questions for every purchase: Do I need it? Can I afford it? Can I borrow one? How was it made? How will I dispose of it? Reduce impulse buys by delaying purchases whenever possible.
5. **When buying new appliances, select energy-efficient and water-conserving models**, especially ones bearing the EPA's Energy Star label. Wait till you have a full load before running a washing machine or dishwasher. Use large appliances – dishwashers/washers/driers – in the early morning or evening to reduce demands on the energy grid.
6. **Buy used.** If you determine that you need an item, consider buying used. This will save money, packaging, and the materials and energy needed to produce the item new. It will also help keep used items in use and out of the landfill.
7. **Eliminate unnecessary disposables.** Use cloth rags, cloth napkins, cloth towels, ceramic dishes and glass glasses etc. Think reusables – not disposables.
8. **Reuse paper**, such as paper towels, and paper napkins. Keep the back side of office paper handy for printing out e-mails and as scratch paper.
9. **Use green cleaning agents** in your home and office that are environmentally friendly and non-toxic. Consider old standbys like baking soda, vinegar and lemon juice. Avoid putting pesticides on your lawn and garden, to reduce contaminated runoff.
10. **Reconnect with nature** – our precious environment – by spending as much time outdoors as possible. Hike, walk, or prepare a picnic!

11. **Buy locally whenever possible**, especially food. Organic food – if available – is your best choice, as there is no after-trail of fertilizers or pesticides. It tastes better too, and less fossil fuel is needed for its transportation and delivery.
12. **Organize a campaign to clean up litter off a roadside**. Be sure to separate out recyclables like aluminum, glass, cardboard, etc.
13. **Consider living in a smaller space**: the “not-so-big” home. Your heating and cooling costs will decline and, with less space to fill, you’re less likely to buy unnecessary things.
14. **Conserve water by employing water-saving techniques** such as taking shorter showers; installing water-conserving showerheads; and using a low-flush toilet. Try not to keep the water running continuously while brushing your teeth, washing dishes, etc.
15. **Conserve energy by disconnecting appliances that are not in use**, such as microwaves, coffeemakers, televisions, etc. Turn off your computer at the end of your work day. Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents. Add or subtract clothing rather than adjusting the thermostat.
16. **Reduce your personal waste stream** (the average American throws out 4.5 pounds of waste per day) by composting your organic waste. Don’t waste food.
17. **Look for paper products with recycled or post-consumer waste content**. Ask your local paper supplier to sell chlorine-free paper products. They are available, but suppliers need to know there is a demand for them.
18. **Get involved with local government** planning issues to ensure that your community uses its land and natural resources in a sustainable way.
19. **Work with teachers and school officials** to make sure that your child’s curriculum includes environmental education.
20. **Share your ideas with others**. Start a simplicity circle, a group of people meeting regularly to share ideas and take steps to simplify their life. For information see *The Circle of Simplicity* by Cecile Andrews, and visit www.seedsofsimplicity.org. Or check out the book *Nothing’s Too Small to Make a Difference* by Wanda Urbanska and Frank Levering (Blair, 2004).