

Earth Day Every Day

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In Vermont, Earth Day, April 22nd, falls at the ripening of spring - when the snow melts, the days warm, the first snowdrops and crocuses color our muddy lawns and we awake at first light - ever earlier - to the sound of songbirds back from their winter respite in points south. These sure signs of the end of nature's winter slumber remind us of our connection to the environment.

On Earth Day, we are reminded that each one of us has a role to play to protect, for our children and grandchildren, the beauty and wonder of this place; the clear trout stream and fresh mountain air, the deep forests and green meadows, the bobcat and the bear. We take stock of the challenges we face as a state, a nation and a world and re-dedicate ourselves to good environmental stewardship.

This Earth Day I ask Vermonters to commit ourselves to celebrating Earth Day every day. Here are ten simple ways you can help.

1. Green up Vermont. Every spring when the snow melts we see litter that has accumulated on our roadsides and in our woods and rivers. Help keep Vermont beautiful by joining a cleanup team in your community on Green Up Day. www.greenupvermont.org.

2. Choose local. Whether it is buying produce at a local farmer's market, honey from a local beekeeper, furniture from a Vermont woodworker or bread from a local bakery, buying local helps preserve Vermont's working landscape, supports a vibrant economy and reduces your carbon

footprint. Better yet, plant a garden! The exercise and fresh healthy, vegetables are good for you and good for the planet.

3. Turn off your car. Idling your car affects Vermont's air quality, contributes to increased incidents of asthma and also contributes to global warming. If Americans cut idling time in half we would prevent as much as 26 million tons of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere each year! If you idle for more than 10 seconds you use more fuel than restarting your engine, so idling also wastes money and gas.

4. Kick your addiction to fossil fuels. Vermonters' leading contributions to global warming (greenhouse gas emissions) come from the fossil fuels we use to heat our homes and businesses and to fuel our cars. Reduce your carbon footprint (and save gas money) by walking, taking a bus, riding a bike and carpooling. Make your next car an electric car! Heat your house using Vermont wood with a woodstove or pellet stove or convert to a heat pump. Visit Efficiency Vermont to take advantage of energy saving incentives. www.encyvermont.com.

5. Button up your house. Give your house an energy audit and find ways to make your home more comfortable while saving money and reducing your carbon footprint. Weatherize your house to save energy, save money and to stay warm. Even better, help your neighbors do this as well by getting your town to participate in the Vermont Home Energy Challenge. http://www.encyvermont.com/for_our_partners/community_partners/residential/town-participation.aspx.

6. Waste not, want not. When we reduce what we use, reuse what we can and recycle the rest, we save money and save the planet! Turn off lights and unplug electronics to conserve electricity and save on your electric bill. Office workers in America use, on average, 10,000 sheets of copy paper each year! Think before you print – and save money and paper by

using email.

7. Fill a reusable water bottle from your tap! Tap water is cleaner, cheaper and healthier than store-bought water. 1.5 million tons of plastic water bottles are thrown out every year. In Vermont we spend more than 10 million dollars every year to ensure that municipal tap water is clean and healthy. Taking advantage of that investment is good for your health, your wallet and the health of our communities.

8. Take a child to a state forest or park. Research shows that a person develops a love of the outdoors and a positive environmental ethic through childhood experiences in nature. We also know that when kids spend many hours every day sitting in front of a television or computer they have a greater risk of obesity, diabetes and depression. There are many great ways to have fun with kids outdoors in Vermont. Take the Vermont Venture Outdoor Challenge and earn a free season's pass to Vermont State Parks, www.vtstateparks.com/htm/venturevt.htm, participate in a Becoming and Outdoor Family program www.uvm.edu/extension/family/?Page=outdoorfamily.html and learn how to hunt, fish and camp, or take your canoe to one of Vermont's many beautiful ponds or rivers.

9. Get involved. Make a difference in your community. Join your conservation commission, energy committee or planning commission. Become a master gardener or urban forester, or volunteer to teach environmental education in your local school.

10. Take time every day to appreciate Vermont's natural beauty. We are lucky to live in Vermont. Get out and enjoy the mountains, rivers and forests, and celebrate Earth Day every day.

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