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SPRING-CLEAN YOUR

ECO HABITS

Five surprising—and surprisingly easy—changes you can make to be kinder to the environment starting now.

NOT-SO-GREAT HABIT

Using body wash all the time

Liquid soaps require five times more energy for raw-material production and nearly 20 times more energy for packaging production than bar soaps do. “And higher energy consumption usually correlates with a higher carbon footprint,” says David Tyler, a professor of chemistry at the University of Oregon, in Eugene.

GREENER HABIT

Stick with bars when you wash up. Not only do they have a considerably lower impact on the environment but also you’ll use less. A study from Zurich’s Institute of Environmental Engineering found that consumers use almost seven times more liquid soap than bar soap when hand washing, so it’s quite likely that we’re overdoing it in the shower as well.

NOT-SO-GREAT HABIT

Being oblivious to your electronics settings

The average home contains about 24 energy-sucking electronic devices, with TVs, desktop computers, cable boxes, and game consoles among the worst. Combined, they consumed about \$20 billion worth of electricity in 2013, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), in New York.

GREENER HABIT

It’s easy to tweak a TV, so start there. Select “home” mode in the setup instead of “retail,” which is meant for a bright in-store display. If there is an automatic brightness control, turn it on. “This feature measures the amount of light in a room and adjusts the screen. This can cut energy use by up to 50 percent,” says Noah Horowitz, a senior scientist for the NRDC. On smart TVs, disable the quick-start function, which eats up extra power.

NOT-SO-GREAT HABIT

Running the dishwasher and the clothes dryer during the day

These machines produce heat and humidity, which means your air conditioner has to work harder, says Jennifer Amann, the buildings program director at the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, in Washington, D.C. Besides, many utility companies charge higher rates during peak hours.

GREENER HABIT

Use your dishwasher and dryer during off-peak hours, which typically start between 8 p.m. and midnight and end around sunrise. (Check with your provider.) For maximum efficiency, use a low dryer setting, and line-dry thick items, like jeans and towels, whenever possible.

NOT-SO-GREAT HABIT

Tossing used coffee pods

Around 9.8 billion K-cup pods were sold in 2014. (They account for a reported 85 to 90 percent of the coffee-pod market.) The number 7 plastic most contain isn’t accepted at many recycling plants (also, plants won’t accept pods if they are filled with coffee), so a majority end up in landfills, says Elizabeth Glazner, the editorial director of the nonprofit organization Plastic Pollution Coalition.

GREENER HABIT

Find a nearby recycling facility that will take them by searching for “number 7 plastic” at search.earth911.com. Then separate the plastic cup from the lid, the filter, and the grounds. The Recycle A Cup gadget (\$13, recycleacup.com) will do this in seconds. Or mail pod plastic to Recycle A Cup for free recycling. Easier yet, use a refillable pod (My K-Cup, \$15, keurig.com).

NOT-SO-GREAT HABIT

Overdoing it with aluminum foil

Americans discarded about 2.8 million tons of aluminum—including containers, cans, and foil—in 2013, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Whereas soiled containers can be recycled, dirty foil can’t. And it can take centuries for aluminum to biodegrade.

GREENER HABIT

Use unbleached parchment paper for baking and roasting as well as for wrapping sandwiches and snacks. It’s biodegradable, compostable, and often reusable.

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SPECIAL SECTION



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