For a happy natural new year

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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This report includes the 90 Percent Reduction guidelines for climate protection.

Seen on the streets of Santa Cruz while biking on the first day of the new solar year:

- A confused plum tree in nearly full flower, thanks to the unusually sunny and dry December.
- Three armed guards posted outside the Bank of America having a laid-back talk.
- Only two Occupiers at their card table outside the court house, where several dozen had held forth for two months.
- Too many cars for oil reality, mostly big ones, polluting around as usual.

What can we do about these situations? Most intelligent people don't want climate change, nor a corporate police state, nor a weak protest movement if they identify with it, and they don't enjoy the status quo of oil dependence and inefficient transportation. Are things out of our hands, such that we are forced to participate in this dysfunctional system as consumers? If we are instead living as independently as possible, do we see things still out of our hands?

Perhaps things are not out of our hands. Perhaps species extinctions and climate forcings are to be taken in stride as we move toward our goals of justice, natural living, and equitable social relationships. How we move forward, or do not, is a critical question when we do not all agree on tactics or on the vision for a sustainable society.

Taking action is the key to positive change. So we need to nurture this impulse, although it is far too weak to see us on through to victory. But victory of what? If action taken will be based on starving and fear, there is no victory for anyone but for narrow, short-term objectives.

When did you realize this is a slave society?

For the vast majority of us, it is so. We are forced to pay money to live on the Earth. If some of us happen to be able to afford it, this doesn't mean we're free. Some of us don't see today's prevalent slavery until personal experience wakes us up. I was raised by parents who for the most part did what they wanted to do when they wanted to do it, and creatively so. I took note of it, so I'm not so much the wage slave or helpless recipient of institutional assistance. What's more important than whether we are victims or successes in today's society, by far, is that not everyone lives in a slave society today. And until fairly recently, very few did. Those societies happen to be non-civilization cultures who were one with, or worshipped, Mother Nature.

The key to freedom and justice is not in reforming civilization -- this attempt has always failed. Civilizations collapse. Instead of finding freedom, justice and peace in today's society, we need to abandon this kind of approach and go back to nature in a big way. This sounds iffy or scary, but it's the only way to get out of a trap. If somehow the funny-money of hoarded digital wealth on Wall Street were seized and redistributed to one and all, we would all still be in the trap of unsustainability. This does not mean that a return to nature means we have no community or technology. But our values and priorities must change. If they do not, we will self-destruct and even accelerate taking down many more species.

To help us get to safety, the answer may lie in living in the moment -- i.e., heightened awareness of the present -- at least for ourselves individually for peace of mind and giving our best. The winter solstice is a time for significant reflection or meditation. The old year comes to a dark close, and renewal begins as the sun increases its presence daily. Somehow I've felt this more strongly this time around than ever before.

Part of our task for survival and building a better life for those we care about is to accept cycles of change, instead of always believing we can structure change and endlessly create. There is a time to take it easy. And that time may be now, more than usually during the natural year. Less can be more, in terms of stressful effort, even in fast-changing times when we need to respond so soundly to bring about positive change.

90 Percent Reduction

When ready to resume the details of framing the social change needed for climate protection, it's handy to have well thought out guidelines. If a 90% reduction in USAnians' greenhouse-gas-generating behavior sounds drastic, let's keep in mind that deep, sustained changes are called for by the vast majority of climate scientists. As far back as twenty years ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said 80% of 1990 levels of greenhouse gases needed to be cut. Instead, they steadily rose, so 80% no longer cuts it.

The following fell into our hands via Albert Bates, who received it from his permaculture/bioregionalist associate Jenny Nazak. She recently circulated these guidelines in the "90 Percent Reduction" Yahoo Group internet list [some punctuation and formatting was added - ed]. Obviously, coming up with national averages doesn't mean that a person in a wet climate needs to conserve as much water as a desert dweller does. Nor does the desired 90% reduction in resource use mean that 40% or 85% reductions are unwelcome or pointless. Deep cuts in emissions mean lifestyle change as well as technological measures for greater efficiency.

Here are the 7 categories:

1. Gasoline. Average American usage is 500 gallons PER PERSON, PER YEAR. A 90 percent reduction would be 50 gallons PER PERSON, PER YEAR.

No reduction in emissions for ethanol or biodiesel.

Public transportation and Waste Veggie Oil Fuel are deemed to get 100 mpg, and should be calculated accordingly.

2. Electricity. Average US usage is 11,000 kwh PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR, or about 900 kwh PER HOUSEHOLD PER MONTH. A 90% reduction would mean using 1,100 PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR or 90 kwh PER HOUSEHOLD PER MONTH.

Solar Renewables are deemed to have a 50% payback - that is, you get twice as many watts.

Hydro and Wind are deemed to have a 4 to 1 payback over other methods - you get 4 times as many.

3. Heating and Cooking Energy. This is divided into 3 categories, gas, wood and oil. Your household probably uses one of these, and they are not interchangeable. If you use an electric stove or electric heat, this goes under electric usage.

Natural Gas (this is used by the vast majority of US households as heating and cooking fuel). For this purpose, Propane will be calculated as the same as natural gas. Calculations in therms should be available from your gas provider.

US Average Natural Gas usage is 1000 therms PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR. A 90% reduction would mean a reduction to 100 therms PER HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR.

Heating Oil (this is used by only about 8% of all US households, mostly in the Northeast, including mine):

Average US usage is 750 Gallons PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR. A 90% cut would mean using 75 gallons PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR. Biodiesel is calculated as equivalent.

Wood. This is a tough one. The conventional line is that wood is carbon neutral, but, of course, wood that is harvested would have otherwise been absorbing carbon and providing forest. There are good reasons to be skeptical about this. So I've divided wood into two categories:

(A) Locally and sustainably harvested, and either using deadwood, trees that had to come down anyway, coppiced or harvested by someone who replaces every lost tree. This is deemed carbon neutral, and you can use an unlimited supply. This would include street trees your town is taking down anyway, wood you cut on your property and replant, coppiced wood (that is, you cut down some part of the tree but leave it to grow), and standing and fallen deadwood. You can use as much of this as you like.

(B) Wood not sustainably harvested, or transported long distances, or you don't know. One cord of this is equal to 15 gallons of oil or 20 therms of natural gas.

4. Garbage. The average American generates about 4.5 lbs of garbage PER PERSON, PER DAY. A 90% reduction would mean .45 lbs of garbage PER PERSON, PER DAY.

5. Water. The Average American uses 100 Gallons of water PER PERSON, PER DAY. A 90% reduction would mean 10 gallons PER PERSON, PER DAY.

6. Consumer Goods. The best metric I could find for this is using money. A Professor at Syracuse University calculates that as an average, every consumer dollar we spend puts .5 lbs of carbon into the atmosphere. This isn't perfect, of course, but it averages out pretty well.

The average American spends 10K PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR on consumer goods, not including things like mortgage, health care, debt service, car payments, etc. Obviously, we recommend you minimize those things to the extent you can, but what we're mostly talking about is things like gifts, toys, music, books, tools, household goods, cosmetics, toiletries, paper goods, etc. A 90% cut would be 1,000 dollars PER HOUSEHOLD, PER YEAR.

Used goods are deemed to have an energy cost of 10% of their actual purchase price. That is, if you buy a used sofa for $50, you just spent $5 of your allotment. The reason for this is that used goods bought from previous owners put money back into circulation that is then spent on new goods. This would apply to Craigslist, yardsales, etc. but not Goodwill and other charities, as noted below. This rule does not apply if you know that the item would otherwise be thrown out - that is, if someone says, ìIf you don't buy it, I'm going to toss it. Those items are unlimited as well, because they keep crap out of landfills.

Goods that were donated are deemed to be unlimited, with no carbon cost. That is, you can spend all you want at Goodwill and the church rummage sale. Putting things back into use that would otherwise be tossed should be strongly encouraged.

7. Food. This was by far the hardest thing to come up with a simple metric for. Using food miles, or price gives what I believe is a radically inaccurate way of thinking about this. So here's the best I can do. Food is divided into 3 categories:

#1 is food you grow, or which is produced LOCALLY AND ORGANICALLY (or mostly - it doesn't have to be certified, but should be low input, because chemical fertilizers produce nitrous oxide which is a major greenhouse contributor). Local means within 100 miles to me. This includes all produce, grains, beans, and meats and dairy products that are mostly either GRASS-FED or produced with HOME GROWN OR LOCALLY GROWN, ORGANIC FEED. That is, chicken meat produced with GM [genetically modified] corn from IOWA in Florida is not local. A 90% reduction would involve this being AT LEAST 70% of your diet, year round. Ideally, it would be even more. I also include locally produced things like soap in this category, if most of the ingredients are local.

#2 is DRY, BULK goods, transported from longer distances. That is, whole, unprocessed beans, grains, and small light things like tea, coffee, spices (fair trade and sustainably grown ONLY) (inevitably sail-transported if from the tropics - ed), or locally produced animal products partly raised on unprocessed but non-local grains, and locally produced wet products like oils. This is hard to calculate, because Americans spend very little on these things (except coffee) and whole grains dont constitute a large portion of the diet. These are comparatively low carbon to transport and produce. Purchased in bulk, with minimal packaging (beans in 50 lb paper sacks, pasta in bulk, tea loose, by the pound, rather than in little bags), this would also include things like recycled toilet paper, purchased garden seeds and other light, dry items. This should be no more than 25% of your total purchases.

3 is Wet goods - conventionally grown meat, fruits, vegetables, juices, oils, milk etc. transported long distances, and processed foods like chips, soda, potatoes. Also regular shampoo, dish soap, etc. And that no one should buy more than 5% of their food in this form. Right now, the above makes up more than 50% of everyone's diet.

Thus, if you purchase 20 food items in a week, youíd use 14 home or locally produced items, 5 bulk dry items, and only 1 processed or out of season item.

Albert Bates' comments : "I think to deal with the military-fascism complex it probably has to include 90% reduction of tax-paying too. That is entirely possible if you simplify and work locally, off the grid, for friends.

"I have quibbles about the wood calculation also, since I have always heated with wood and have done extensive research on the carbon math (a couple chapters are devoted to this in The Biochar Solution) but I can join the 90% group and and take my quibbles up there."

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Take the
Pledge for Climate Protection

Let the beautiful Earth provide

Here are 10 vital steps to slow global warming and climate destabilization. Some of these steps may be difficult at first, but all are fun, save money, and offer exercise and social opportunities.