



Ecologic

- the green hornet

What's Best?

I may be the only one but I'll ask the question anyway; do you ever find yourself factoring into your decision making process a consideration for the impact on the planet of a particular action you are contemplating? As I reflect on this question, I can't help but wonder if there wasn't a more cumbersome way to have phrased it.

Maybe it's best to approach the subject by way of a few examples. I have an artificial Christmas tree and it is undoubtedly a petroleum based product. It came with 1,000 lights, but only 871 are currently working and I've had the tree for about ten years. I'm only guessing, but I think that what I have done is a 'greener' approach than purchasing a 'live' tree every year; but maybe not.

Let's take a moment to beat the subject to death. The artificial tree was assembled in a factory with equipment that was fueled by fossil fuels and of materials that were made of petrochemicals by machines that used fossil fuels to make them go and of steel that was mined and transported and formed by more machines that burned fossil fuels. So this artificial tree has been responsible for much CO₂ that has been spewed into the atmosphere as well as other regulated and non-regulated pollutants into the atmosphere and most likely into water sources as well. Further, there is probably some environmentally unfriendly perpetually toxic out-gassing component to the artificial tree as well.

The 'live' tree on the other hand, was most likely planted and grown in a sustainable forest type situation; lopped down and shipped out. But by the same token, it's important to consider whatever fertilizer was used to grow the tree and the transportation effects; the artificial tree just needed to get to the customer once but a 'live' tree needs to get to the consumer every year. Also, are the 'live' trees being lopped down by man or machine? If machine, then it's probably fueled by fossil fuels; if by man, then he probably had to eat more for the calories necessary to have the energy to fuel his Christmas tree lopping activities; and just what did he eat anyway? Was that food grown in a sustainable way? Did it make him too excessively contributing to the methane in the atmosphere? Methane is about ten times worse than CO₂ as a green house gas.

There's also the question about the ultimate disposition of the trees; what's recyclable, what's not?...you get the picture; there's a lot to this so I'll never know what the true bottom-line is to the earth - but I do know that the artificial tree has saved me about \$600 over the past ten years and that's green enough for me.

Treehugger.com is an enviro website that has lots to say about 'green'. If you go to the website and search on 'washing dishes', you will see at least 14 responses that deal with

the subject of which is greener; washing dishes by hand or by machine? I've read a few of those articles and the conclusion is that it is inconclusive; there are too many variables. So the bottom-line here is that the net impact on the earth is indeterminable regarding this highly complex household chore.

There was a local environmental company that was having an executive meeting several hundred miles away. The firm concluded that it was greener to rent a large van to transport the half dozen or so employees to the meeting than it was to fly them there by a commercial airline. I may be wrong, but my guess is that the airplane was going there anyway with our without these guys but the van was going there only for these guys. But in reality, the bottom-line may have been more economically - than environmentally - driven.

This is before the CO2 issue really took root, but I recall a story in the newspaper about a publicity stunt where a gas station had rolled back prices to something really low. People came from miles around to wait in line to fill up. The newspaper interviewed a guy who had come about a hundred miles to fill up his pickup truck and was thrilled at his savings. My quick calculations determined that the guy either lost money on the deal or 'saved' just a dollar or two; I don't know if I was the only one who picked-up on that.

The health care profession, food service industry, the CDC and soap manufacturers are really pushing the fact that you need to wash your hands all the time, especially with the renewed threat of swine flu. If everyone really did that, we might be healthier but that would certainly drain our water supplies post haste; it may be better for the planet if we just got the flu instead.

Do I take mass transit or drive into town? It's hard to make the case that driving is 'greener' but for many of us who have to drive halfway there to get to a train station, not by much. Because of a lack commuter parking or any of hundreds of other reasons, if someone actually takes you to the train station and picks you up, taking mass transit is probably worse for the environment and may cost more too.

So who will sit in green judgment? Except for that guy who drove two hundred miles to fill up his gas tank, I would say that practically everything we do defies a discernment of the net green bottom-line benefit to the planet. You could go crazy trying to figure it out but maybe if you spend all your time analyzing the prospects, you won't have time to actually carry the activity out and that may be the greenest solution of all; a population of theorizing couch potatoes.

Actually, government mandates that increase the costs of fossil fuel derived energy will have us solely focused on minimizing the personal dollar impact and with any luck, the unintended consequences won't be disruptive enough to do us in. So for the moment, what say we recycle what we can and curse what we can't?