



- The tilt of the Earth's axis which varies on a cycle every 41,000 years.
- The precession of the equinoxes on a cycle of every 22,000 years.<sup>5</sup>

While I admit to not really understanding a word of the above, it did sound very convincing to me. Of course, then it is reported that the George C Marshall Institute that presented these findings is in part funded by the oil industry<sup>6</sup>. No wonder I'm confused. There is always the possibility that it's a conspiracy between the cows and the trees to destroy the planet and all human life along with it<sup>7</sup>.

I am not going to worry unduly about the rights or wrongs of the reasons for going green. I am comfortable with the idea that I may well save money, feel healthier, and be prepared for the day when the riot squad are automatically deployed in response to the microchip in the lid detecting an errant banana skin being placed in the wrong wheelie bin. The amount of information available and the sheer complexity of weighing up every single issue for every single decision is enough to make me want to stop before I have started. I can't worry whether fair trade goods are being unfairly marked up by the supermarkets, or whether some fair trade countries still use child labour, or even what the environmental costs are of the production of plastic toys in far off lands. It just makes everything too hard.

## The first 30 days

"My husband has started putting one cup of water in the kettle. Every time I go to make a quick cup of tea there's no water in there. It's bloody annoying."

### DAY ONE

I am gripped with enthusiasm on my first day of being green. I have visited a number of websites belonging to green organisations that are full of blinding glimpses of the obvious to help the newly converted.

My first action is to sign up for the mail preference service. This has the effect of telling all direct mail marketing companies that they can no longer send direct mail to your home. About 70% of the mail we receive is unsolicited direct mail. I suspect that I will miss the emotional boost that comes from knowing that I have been pre-approved to receive huge sums of money at outrageous rates of interest, but this is one sacrifice I am prepared to make.

#### **The Mailing Preference Service**

The Mailing Preference Service (MPS) is one of a set of preference



services that are free to subscribe to and prevent unsolicited marketing material from reaching you. There is also the Telephone Preference Service (TPS), Fax Preference Service (FPS) and the Baby Preference Service (which cuts down mailings of baby-related products and services). The easiest way to register is online at [www.mpsonline.org.uk](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk), although it is also possible to register by telephone on 0845 7034599.

They claim that registration will reduce direct mail by 95%.<sup>8</sup>

## DAY TWO

In line with advice from various websites I have turned down the thermostat that controls our central heating. Most of these sites suggest turning it down by one degree. In a continuing burst of enthusiasm I have turned ours down by three degrees. Less than an hour after doing this my wife walks into the room. The conversation went something like:

“Is there something wrong with the heating?”

“I don’t think so.”

”It’s freezing in here.”

At that point she turned the thermostat back up to a point somewhere beyond where it had been in the first place. So much for that idea. Secretly I turn it back down later in the day – but not as far. She doesn’t notice.



## DAY THREE

As one of the most common pieces of advice I have seen about how to save electricity is to switch things off rather than to leave them on standby, I have decided to try and break what can only be described as a standby dependency. This is proving somewhat difficult as the couch is very nearly a whole seven feet away from the television. The remote control is only six inches from my fingertips.

Ironically, the standby dependency is not as much of a problem when turning off the television as it is when turning it back on again. I don’t mind getting up from the couch and making a short diversion via the off button. The problem is that I don’t like falling into the seat and reaching for the remote control only to realise I haven’t turned the television on, which means I have to get up again. Now I wouldn’t say I was lazy, but this is proving a heavy burden to carry.

It’s not just the television either. Standby is a problem with the CD player as well, which stays on standby unless it’s been switched off at the wall. This has always struck me as a particularly stupid design feature. The computer monitor is almost always left as a blank screen on standby as well.

I have, fortunately, discovered an easy answer to the television problem, which is to get my three year old to go and switch the television on for me. She thinks this is great fun as she isn’t allowed to touch the television. I’m not sure what you do if you haven’t got a three year old though.

I know that standby alone isn’t going to fix our electricity



problem. Most days we are using over 40 kilowatt/hours. A kilowatt is a thousand watts, so a kilowatt hour is the equivalent of leaving ten 100 watt light bulbs on for an hour, so our daily usage is close to leaving 20 100 watt bulbs on for 24 hours a day. Even by my standards this seems ridiculous.

At the moment it is a bit of a case of trial and error in terms of trying to discover how all this electricity is being used, but there is no harm in switching things off if we're not actually using them. I'm surprised at just how much can actually be switched off. In particular there are two power tools in the garage that are left on almost permanent charge, and I am using an old laptop computer that stays plugged in overnight. Switching these off seems to have an almost immediate effect on the speed with which the power company is able to take my money away. Some further analysis of the situation shows that the battery on the laptop has actually given up the ghost. (I don't use it on battery power so I have never noticed before.) As a result, the battery isn't holding any charge, so all the time it was switched on it was pulling power trying to charge a battery that was never going to be fully charged. This, as an aside, has also explained why the office used to get so warm all the time.

Battery chargers seem to be particularly bad for electricity consumption, probably because of our tendency to leave them switched on for long periods of time, even when they no longer need to be charging. Apparently, if we all switched off mobile phone chargers overnight this would save enough electricity to power 66,000 homes for a year, and would have



the added benefit of reducing how much time we all spend making meaningless telephone calls.

## DAY FOUR

One of the areas of life that we clearly have to improve in order to be greener is our use of the car. In some ways we have already (admittedly by accident) improved the way in which we use the car in that I work at home for five days a week, while my wife also works from home at least two days a week. Although this means we have increased electricity usage from the regular coffee intake required to get through the day, and the inevitable computers, printers, and massaging chairs that no good home office could be without, it does mean our commuting cost to the environment is a lot less than it has been in the past. (The massaging chair is just wishful thinking by the way.)

Road traffic pollution and congestion is probably the single environmental issue I notice more than anything else. Over the last few years my annual mileage has been about 8,500 miles per annum, even though I rarely have to drive long distances any more, and the fact that driving into London was a deeply distressing experience has always discouraged me far more than any congestion charge ever could. (If anything, a reduced traffic load in London makes driving there seem more attractive.) I only have to drive round the North Circular or even make it onto the M25 to be convinced of the need to do something about the amount of time all of us seem to spend in the car.