

Capital Crime against the Planet

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Saving the world has taken on a new meaning in 2008. It may be that our very way of living is coming to an end but how we are going to end it depends on every single human being on this planet.

If you have been following the danger signs described by the media in recent years you have definitely heard of green house gases that are destroying our planet. Green house gases are chemical compounds found in the atmosphere. As these gases are see through elements they allow sunlight to enter our atmosphere freely. The Earth's surface reflects this sunlight as infrared radiation or less scientifically, heat. Greenhouse gases absorb this heat and trap it in the atmosphere. In order to keep the Earth's surface at a constant temperature this heat reflects into the atmosphere and should be able at the same time to gradually be reflected back into space.

So global warming is effectively the disturbance of this balance of heat being exchanged between the sun, our atmosphere, and our planet's surface. If we cloud our atmosphere with too many gases the atmosphere becomes too clouded for heat to escape back into space. So the scientists are saying that our emissions of man made gases exceed the amount produced by nature.

With all the talk of recycling our products and their carbon footprints; one has to stop and ask themselves if we as a consuming population can have any part in controlling how much of these gases we expel into our atmosphere. The true problem is the consumer population we have created through politics and capitalism. Consumerism and the production of items, alone, contribute to a large amount of CO₂ that goes into the planet's atmosphere. Think about all the things that go into producing the simplest of items we might consume at a supermarket or in our daily lives. It has to come from somewhere which means it has to be flown or trucked to its destination in a store. Transportation of our goods isn't the only thing adding to CO₂

emissions but the very factories most of them run by multi-million dollar businesses expel harmful gases into the atmosphere daily and pollute our water. Often these factories are resident in undeveloped countries where the international community has complained about their excess production of CO₂ gasses. A recent report by *The Independent* tells of a soup of plastic drifting in the Pacific Ocean. Can you believe it, here we are in 2008 and talks, taxes, and more talks are being spewed forth as tons of un-biodegradable plastic is floating around our oceans? An American oceanographer named Charles Moore discovered the “trash vortex” and reports it stretching between the coast of Hawaii and Japan. So we don’t just have an emissions problem but we also have an objective waste problem that stems into our ecosystem directly. It’s pretty simple here on planet earth; what we put in our ecosystems eventually ends up on our plates. I like to recall a proverb we have in the US that says *don’t shit where you eat*. Sounds simple enough but what if your way of life entitled doing so, without being able to see, the effects of doing so, directly.

Treaties like the Kyoto agreement which was signed by over 174 countries except the leader in greenhouse emissions the United States, were meant to give countries around the world a chance to lower their emissions and give them time to react consequently. This treaty was drawn up in 2005. Now we are three years down the road, from that treaty, and scientists who monitor the ice caps in the Antarctica warn us on a daily basis of CO₂ emissions clouding our atmosphere not allowing heat on the earth’s surface to rise contributing to the ice caps melting. Recently a second chance, if you will, was designed under the same idea of lowering our emission called the Bali Agreement. Talks about the EU forcing the United States to sign the agreement have started and the president of the UN, climate chief Yvo de Boer says nobody will sign if the United States doesn’t sign the agreement first.

That’s the international scene of ecological affairs, but what happens here at Farnham University? What are students doing to change our ecological problems on a local scale? Who and what is the university staff doing to tackle our ecological problems?

Here at Farnham University it seems we have more than just a few facilities that make recycling possible. Not only does the college have waste collection three times a week, it doesn't ask of students to sort their recyclable waste. Although that is the case, there are only seems to be a lack of interest by students. Including the University paying for garbage to be sorted and recycled there are bins in the parking lot across from Waitrose. Waverly Council Borough and a few others supply most of these bins by independent recycling companies. There are bins for green, brown, and clear glass. An independent company called Recresco has two bins for recycling beverage cartons. The European Recycling Company Limited supplies a shoebox for giving to an organization that provides used clothing for the poor. There are two bins for recycling newspaper and magazines provided by Grundon Recycle. Yet another company supplies one more bin for newspapers and magazines called Aylesford Newsprint. The Chambers Co. provides bins for the University campus including the student village, which does not demand of students to sort the garbage. I took a look at some of the bins provided on campus and often found that they were half empty or people had not even bothered to put their garbage in any bags. I met up with the man on campus who is responsible for all the waste at our Farnham campus, Bob Dalton. Mr Dalton offered me a lot of information about the efforts and the estimate of garbage collected at on campus as well as the student village. Mr Dalton's duties are to ensure that all waste is removed from the campus, efficiently. Mr Dalton explained how the university pays the Chambers Co. to collect and remove the garbage three times a week and how the process takes place. He said he has been to these sites and seen the process for himself. I too witnessed one of their facilities located in Guildford and was astonished to find a depot buzzing with trucks and sorting machines. Some of the garbage is sorted on a conveyer belt by hand as well. It starts with the garbage being sorted firstly at a depot in Aldershot and then sent to Slyfield in Guildford for a second sorting where he estimated 75% of the waste is recycled. Including the waste from students living in the student village. In 2006-7 the ballpark figure was one million cubic tonnes of waste collected. This is equivalent to 12 feet of garbage spread out over the area of our Farnham campus. According to the figures given by Mr Dalton 750,000 tones of that waste is recycled. Mr Dalton

said: "Any conscious person can see we have the facilities available its up to the public to take responsibility for their environment." Obviously, health and safety laws enforce the removal of waste but not specifically the recycling of it. Central government and local councils impose most of the laws concerning the enforcement of recycling. These rules are only guidelines and targets; they have not yet become active pieces of legislation. The only legislation enforced are limits imposed by the European Union to cut down on certain CO2 emissions, which are produced by domestic and business organizations. Mr Dalton also explained me that the University of Kent is currently looking for an energy and environmental manager to advise them on ecological solutions for all five campuses. I spoke to the Student Union president, Jon Oliver who showed me a box full of little green recycling bags for students who wish to recycle their ink jet cartridges and old mobile telephones. If you want to recycle your ink jet cartridges you can get them refilled at most photo copy and print businesses.

Governments have tried putting heavy taxes rather on the consumer than the companies who produce our waste. Governments themselves invest billions of dollars each year in the production of bombs and the exploding of them either in foreign countries or right in their own back yards. If we forget about the ethical problems of using warfare and focus on the amount of man made gases going into our earth's surface and atmosphere, then you can see just how difficult this task we have actually is. Due to a way of life, we have been trained generation after generation to maintain, man's pollution is a chain of reactions that starts firstly with the way we live. Civilization is based upon a steady control of trade and thus depends on capitalism in order to secure this way of life. I don't claim to have any answers to solving this serious problem we have created; maybe scrutinizing the way we live is a start. No one is going to be able to give up their cars if it deters them from going to and from work. No one is going to give up comforts or luxuries in order to save the future of the planet. We are groomed to function in a society that is on a whole very selfish. The whole point behind capitalism is to allow its citizens the

freedom to choose their path in life and so thus this wanting to change attitude is the best feedback we can optimistically await from our worldly counterparts. Although, recycling maybe of some help, it too takes energy to recycle such materials as plastic and the end result there is emissions of gasses being expelled into our atmosphere in order to recycle those materials. Personally, I think all of this talk from environmental organizations and the governments (mainly developed countries) is just that, talk. There is truly something wrong with the way of life we have pre-designed, there is too much waste, there is too much energy being used to sustain this way of life and we encourage under-developed countries to follow in our footsteps. Maybe the developed nations aren't as developed as they claim to be, if it is we have all this knowledge but cease to know how to use it to the benefit of mankind and its future.