

Practical Guide to a better Environment through Personal Action

WITHOUT THE EARTH WE ARE NOTHING

We do not dwell on it much, but we do owe a lot to the Earth. Without forests and without oxygen we would not be able to breathe. Without soil we would not be able to eat. Without rain and rivers we would not be able to drink. On Earth we can do something which is impossible on other planets: we can live. In spite of that, we seem to show little respect for our home. We must even put forward the question: for how much longer will Earth be habitable?



Many of our forests are sick; our rivers are polluted, our air is poisoned. The climate may change dramatically in the future. Our soil has been contaminated in many places. We do not even know how to dispose of our own garbage in a suitable way.

THE ENVIRONMENT, OUR ENVIRONMENT, YOUR ENVIRONMENT

The state of the environment is deteriorating all the time. For now, we are only capable of slowing down the pace of this deterioration. Only after a number of years will we be able to really improve the situation. Here are a number of useful tips that can help preserve the environment at home, in shops, in your garden, at work and on the road. Here are also some examples of what Industry, the Government, Agriculture, the food and construction industries can do for a better environment, today and in the future. Unless we want to leave insurmountable environmental problems for our children and grand-children to solve, we must assume our responsibilities and work on them immediately.



A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH LESS GARBAGE

The average Lebanese produces approximately 300 kg of garbage every year. The garbage mainly goes to a refuse dump or incinerator. Dumping and incineration both produce harmful chemical substances, such as dioxin gas, which permeate the environment. Refuse dumps pollute the air, water and soil. The ever-increasing quantity of garbage in Lebanon is becoming a real cause for alarm. It is high time we say good-bye to our throw-away society: plastic coffee cups, throw-away lighters, pencils and cameras.



We must work to throw out less. As is the case in other countries, the Government, trade and industry will have to cooperate to ban unnecessary packaging within the next few years. More refuse will have to be recycled, not only paper and glass but also cans and synthetic materials. We must use more returnable containers returnable that carry a refund.

What can you do?

1. Whenever possible, buy durable products rather than throwaway ones.
2. Choose articles with a simple wrapping, preferably not packed in plastic or foam.
3. Buy fresh unpacked vegetables; this will also save energy.
4. Limit the number of plastic shopping bags, or bring your own shopping basket (many Western countries charge for plastic bags to encourage people to bring their own bags).
5. Don't waste paper.
6. Try to repair broken things before immediately going out to buying new, e.g. TVs and shoes.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH SEPARATING YOUR HOUSEHOLD REFUSE

However hard we try to limit the amount of trash we produce, our garbage bag will fill up sooner or later. That is not in itself a disaster as long as we are aware that it is essential to separate refuse, not only because many materials may be recycled but also because some substances in your garbage can seriously pollute the environment.

What can you do?

7. Don't throw carton and old paper in the garbage; it can easily be recycled. Some people are already collecting it, although this should be organized and encouraged much more by the Government.
8. Buy drinks in returnable bottles.
9. Don't throw away your old clothes and shoes, give them to charity.
0. If you have a garden, use fruit and vegetable waste to make compost.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT MEANS FEWER HARMFUL CHEMICALS

The dumping of harmful chemicals in our rivers and lakes must stop. Purification plants will remove chemicals from our sewage but if our water becomes even more polluted, additional expensive and sophisticated purification plants will be needed. These will have to be financed by the citizens. A better and cheaper solution is to limit pollution to a minimum. Detergents without phosphates already exist; now it is up to us to urge the Government to ban sulphates from detergents as well. In the agricultural sector, we must work to ban the most aggressive insecticides, while industries should be made to abide by very strict regulations on waste management.

Other than water, air quality should be carefully monitored to control the output many dangerous substances such as carbon dioxide and alcohol. Volatile dement found in paint, turpentine and thinner evaporate quickly and added to other gases, cause smog and acid rain. Agreements must be made with the industrial sector to limit the amount of carbon dioxides in the air. Paints with low carbon dioxide content already exist.

What can you do?

11. Look out for detergents without sulphates or phosphates.
12. Avoid using too much laundry softener: it still contains high quantities of sulphates and phosphates.
13. Substitute regular detergents and Clorox for more natural products, such as liquid soap.
14. Choose unbleached paper products whenever possible.
15. Avoid buying decorated paper products (tissues, toilet paper, kitchen roll) as the ink pollutes water.
16. Many toilet fresheners contain harmful substances; try to use natural air fresheners, such as dried lavender.
17. Use water-based paint where possible.
18. Do not burn painted or impregnated wood, this pollutes the air.
19. Avoid using pesticides.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH LESS CFCs

The ozone layer protects the Earth against harmful rays. The ozone layer is thinning and over the South Pole, there already is a large and ever increasing hole. CFC gases are the main cause of the deterioration of the ozone layer. They are emitted, for example, by the cooling systems of our refrigerators. While many sprays used to contain CFCs tough regulations have made them rarer. However, we should work to see a law imposed on the industrial sector to completely ban the use of CFCs and seek less harmful substitutes.

What can you do?

21. Don't buy sprays containing CFCs.
22. Lobby the government to find a way of disposing of old refrigerators and freezers in an environment-friendly way.



A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH REDUCED ENERGY CONSUMPTION

We all know we should not misuse our fossil fuels because they will not last forever. We also know that saving energy saves money. Power stations are a threat to the environment because they release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is the main cause of the greenhouse effect, which is threatening the climatic balance on Earth. The greenhouse effect may threaten to melt the ice in the North Pole and as a result the sea level will rise, flooding many coastal areas. In addition, lack of rain is likely to cause desertification in many places. Each time we turn on a light, the power station has to supply electricity. Carbon dioxides are released into the air and the greenhouse effect is intensified. The Government must be urged to impose taxes on the use of raw materials in order to minimise the release of carbon dioxides into the air.

What can you do?

23. Turn on the lights only where needed.
24. Check the energy consumption of electrical appliances before buying.
25. Choose electrical appliances that work on electricity rather than on batteries.
26. Don't heat rooms, which are not in use.
27. Try to wash your launch, at lower temperatures.
28. Insulate your house well.
29. Replace normal light bulbs by fluorescent or energy saving bulbs.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH LESS WATER CONSUMPTION

Every Lebanese consumes 100 litres of water per day. If we continue to use too much water, ground water levels will decrease. Plants and trees will suffer.

What can you do?

30. Do not leave the tap running while dishwashing, shaving or brushing teeth.
31. Avoid dishwashers, they consume a lot of water and energy and the detergents are damaging to the environment.
32. Repair leaking taps.
33. Use the *washing* machine only when fully loaded.
34. Wash your car with buckets of water rather than with a hose, which consumes large quantities of water.
35. Spray your garden in summer only early in the morning or in the evening: during the day, the sun immediately evaporates the water.
36. Choose water-saving shower-heads
37. Choose the new water closets on the market, which have a flush stop. In Europe they have already proved a success as they save a considerable amount of water

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH USING YOUR CAR LESS

These days, many cars are equipped with catalytic converters, which is an improvement. But still cars pollute the air, cause noise and harmful emissions. A large percentage of the car trips we make is shorter than 5 kilometres. These are the most polluting because the engine is still cold. Unfortunately, public transport in Lebanon is still under-developed and cars are almost unavoidable. Support and use all new public transportation systems such as buses. Lobby the government to introduce rules to stimulate the use of cleaner trucks.



What can you do?

38. Try not to use your car for short distances, walk instead.
39. Drive in quietly and calmly and respect speed limits.
40. Do not adjust the engine of your car, leave that to the technicians.
41. Check the tyres for the right pressure; it can save up to 5% of fuel consumption and increase safety
42. Do not over use the choke but drive slowly when the car is still cold.

43. Turn off the engine when you have to wait for some time in a traffic jam.
44. Buy a car with a catalytic converter.
45. If you have plans to move, consider living close to your place of work.
46. Try to car-pool with other people while going to work or taking children to school.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS AT WORK

Try to be aware of the environment at work:

49. Try to separate paper waste and the normal waste: 1,000 kilos of paper means 12 trees!
50. Throw old typewriter ribbon, correction fluid and markers away separately (nobody is yet collecting small chemical waste in Lebanon, persuade the government to do so)
51. Do not use plastic coffee cups.
52. Turn off computers and IT lamps when not in use; it saves energy and it is not harmful to start them again, in spite of what some people believe.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITHOUT MESS

A better environment starts also on the streets, in the water and in the countryside. Litter is a dangerous source of pollution as eventually it will end up poisoning soil & water.

What you can do?

53. Do not leave litter behind in the wilderness or on the streets.
54. Do not throw litter or oil in water.

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH EVERYBODY

The state of the environment is now so alarming that all citizens of Lebanon must do their share. Industry will have to limit the emissions of detrimental gasses and other waste. The construction sector will have to use more environment friendly materials and re-use some discarded materials. The agricultural sector will have to limit the use of pesticides. Car breaking yards will have to dismantle and separate parts and try to facilitate their re-use. Supermarkets and food producers will have to decrease the use of PVC in packing.



A BETTER ENVIRONMENT STARTS WITH YOURSELF

We are all inclined to point the finger at others when we speak about pollution. To Industry, politicians, farmers, other countries and neighbours

Constructive criticism is useful, but we ourselves are also responsible: at home, in the garden, at work and on the street. Do we have an option when it comes to ensuring the Earth remains a liveable place? Is not our duty towards ourselves and our children?