

# Conservation—

## *Saving Energy*

Ian Woofenden

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*Derivation: From Latin conservare, to preserve.*

Last column, I talked about efficiency, the ratio of energy out to energy in. Energy efficiency makes sense no matter what you're doing, and it's easy to sell. It gives you more bang for your energy buck, and is the best first investment if you're planning to generate your own renewable electricity. Energy efficiency means doing whatever job you want to do with a minimum of energy waste.

Efficiency is one piece of a larger pie called conservation. Conservation includes not only energy efficiency, but also changing your habits, doing with less, and even doing without. In today's consumer society, this is definitely harder to sell. Too many folks want it all and want it now. Technology can be addictive, and can overpower our ethics (see *Ozonal Notes* in this issue).

Personally, I think we should all focus not just on energy efficiency, but also on conservation. But I also respect human choices, and feel that people have to come to their own conclusions in their own time. So I shy away from preaching about conservation in general, and instead emphasize how energy efficiency can save natural resources and dollars no matter what you're doing.

When it comes to transportation, conservation can include asking yourself how many vehicles you really need, and how many trips you take in them. This can get pretty personal! It's easy to criticize others, but more to the point to examine our own transportation lifestyle. Carpooling, using mass transit, bicycling, walking, and just staying at home can be conserving options.

Putting on a sweater instead of cranking up the temperature in your home can conserve a lot of energy. Your home needs a "sweater" too—making sure you have adequate insulation is a smart move. And consider the size of your home and appliances too. A key component of conservation is using less. Smaller homes, smaller appliances, and smaller vehicles tend to be more conserving to make and use.

Before finding the most efficient appliances you can buy, you can ask yourself whether you really need all of them. Choices vary, but I know people who do without a dryer, many small appliances, and even a refrigerator, preferring to use less energy intensive means to do the jobs these appliances do.

Conservation also includes thinking about when and how you use appliances. Doing full loads of dishes and

laundry can save a lot of energy and water. Even simple things like heating up a single cup of tea instead of a whole teakettle's worth can make a difference. And turning off the lights when you're not using them is an obvious move. It's more conserving to turn lights off when you leave the room and on when you enter the room than to leave them all on all the time, just in case you need them. And adjusting your energy usage to not coincide with times of utility peak demand can decrease the need for new generating plants, which conserves energy on several levels.

On a family level, I find that building conservation and efficiency into our home's infrastructure is usually easier than building it into my family's habits. After the light on our shop porch was left on several times, I installed a timer, so even I can't leave it on for more than 15 minutes. Using super-efficient lightbulbs means that when they are left on, they are using a quarter of the energy a cheap incandescent would use.

Conservation can take some unusual twists too. For years, I've heard and preached that you can't heat with

**Author Ian Woofenden cooking lunch on a solar powered hot plate (made by Cadco), while wearing his favorite sweater (made by his wife).**



solar electricity—no electric stoves or dryers in off-grid homes! But our PV system runs a large surplus for most of the summer, so I recently bought an electric hotplate so we can do some of our cooking with solar electricity. This saves propane, and keeps our solar electricity from being wasted.

For lots of good information on conserving energy in your life, I recommend the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy ([www.acee.org](http://www.acee.org)), and the Rocky Mountain Institute ([www.rmi.com](http://www.rmi.com))—especially their book *Homemade Money: How to Save Energy and Dollars in Your Home*.

Every situation is different, but all of us have many opportunities to conserve energy. Even solar energy is not without its impact, and it just makes common sense to lighten up our load on the planet and on our own personal energy and financial reserves.

**Access**

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