

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Can We Afford to Care About the Environment?

Dear EcoGirl: I'm anxious about our economy, with rising gas and food prices, soaring insurance and medical costs, even food riots and quotas. How can we worry about the environment, even global climate change, when real survival issues are at stake? *Signed, Troubled in Santa Rosa*

Dear Troubled: Yes, the current economic issues seem daunting, and it's reasonable to take care of our well-being. However, even with all its trendy talk of "green," our culture largely forgets that our survival requires a functioning planet, which our current economic system is rapidly destroying.

Therefore, taking care of our well-being must include shifting how we relate to both money and the earth.

Five Reasons That Eco-Action Is Timely

Here's why I think that eco-action is vital and timely for our survival.

(1) All economies depend on healthy ecosystems. Although the connections aren't usually made, many of our economic problems are caused by squandering nature's resources and crippling her systems.

Thus, when fisheries collapse, so do fishermen's livelihoods; mass bee dieoffs risk our food supply; increasingly-severe weather events create a previously-unimaginable scale of destruction; our ravenous hunger for limited oil amplifies its cost; and pollution generates widespread death and disease.

Still, our economic system often rewards that which undermines its foundations. I saw today that monied interests just squashed vital global warming legislation. I wonder, did anyone total the financial costs of derailing our global weather systems? As a beekeeper once said to me, "If you want expensive food, try having no bees."

(2) Therefore, our financial and physical well-being depends on changing our relationship with the earth — quickly, significantly, and at all levels. Green is more than a fashion statement; it's a call to quickly steer ourselves away from the cliff's edge.

(3) Disruption is a good time for big changes, both positive and negative. When systems flux, the rules and power structures destabilize, people can seek new ideas, and our actions can impact more powerfully.

Certainly, it can be scary, and people in fear can grasp at glossy-but-harmful plans or give their power to dictators based on false promises. Collapse doesn't automatically create consciousness. That's why it's vital that we encourage truly wise new directions.

(4) Constructive action by everyone is vital. Now is not a time we can be neutral. We don't get to choose "all things stay the same." The earth's seams are coming apart and we're running out of options. Without large-scale change, the crises will quickly escalate, often irreversibly. Inaction just continues our destructive trajectory and leaves a vacuum that selfish motives can manipulate.

However, by acting early, we can save both money and pain. It's always cheaper to avoid an accident than clean up afterwards. Plus arriving early better positions us to profit from the changes (see the book *Natural Capitalism*). These problems are too big to wait for price signals or until the crises hit our home.

(5) A better world is possible. Taking action doesn't have to be hard or expensive. In fact, it can fun to dust off abandoned dreams and let go of feeling powerless. Many people have sought security by half-heartedly joining old-school mainstream organizations, now at risk of crumbling.

Why cling to these when we can support a better future instead?

Yes, change can be hard, and we need to mourn the losses. But, by understanding the dynamics, we can create responses that are elegant, intelligent, flexible, compassionate, and effective. Then, as we help create a better world and life, a weight just might lift from our hearts, revealing the joy of reconnecting with nature's aliveness and community's collaborations.

Is that just a fantasy? I don't think so. It will take work, yes, but humanity used to live aligned with the earth, and I think we ache for it in our bones. Anyway, what's the point of life if not to go for the really great dreams?

The looming environmental and economic crises will bring change, one way or another. The question is just how smooth and constructive it'll be. The answer depends on us. We can avert catastrophe and create a better reality, if we choose.

If you like this column's ideas, please share it with others, to help inform our shared thinking. Also, next month I'll explore what we can do to nurture green transitions in our money, work, and economic systems. Please email me the solutions that you love!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this column in your periodical. "EcoGirl believes that everyone can be a superhero for the planet. Then she shows you how!"

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