

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Reducing Your Transportation Footprint

Dear EcoGirl: My heart is breaking as I watch the impacts of the Gulf oil gusher. How can I help reduce our country's need to drill in such risky and sensitive ecological areas? *Signed, Motivated*

Dear Motivated: Yes, I've also been frustrated seeing the slow motion devastation of the Gulf's ecosystems and livelihoods. Unfortunately, this is just one example of the many negative impacts that petroleum use inherently has on our health and the planet. Other harm includes ongoing leaks and spills, worker illness and fatalities, and destructive greenhouse gases causing major climate disruption. (More about this is at www.patriciadines.info/a_PPUproot09.html.)

It's important for us to see that we're not separate from this harm. The oil is being drilled to power our cars, make our consumer products, and transport our goods. While the U.S. has only 4% of the world's population (and only 3% of proven oil reserves), we're responsible for 25% of the world's oil consumption.

Sadly, unless we change our path, these problems will get worse. Experts believe that our global oil supply has peaked, making it progressively harder to obtain sufficient supplies. Also, other nations reasonably aspire to our living standards, further increasing demand for oil and risking more dangerous drilling practices, power politics, price increases, global climate collapse, etc.

The good news is that we can relieve the demand pressure and reduce the harm by cutting our everyday oil use and supporting earth-friendly energy sources. We can create a happier future by shifting from "business as usual." Let's use this pain to inspire meaningful action!

Cutting Our Direct Oil Impacts

Passenger cars comprise 40% of U.S. oil use, according to the Natural

Resources Defense Council, so that's a good place to start reducing. Here's some ideas how:

1) Buy a new car? Often the first suggestion we hear is to buy a hybrid. And, if you're already buying a car, certainly choose a high mileage one, including *some* hybrids. (Car gas mileage information is at www.fueleconomy.gov.) Also consider an electric car; they should become increasingly available. (Note: The "e-car" strategy must also include greening the U.S. power supply, which is currently half coal, another eco-destroyer.)

2) Reduce the impacts of your current car. (This is usually cheaper and more ecological than buying a new one.) To do this, you can:

- **Improve your car's mileage.** For instance, keep your tires filled and engine tuned, avoid idling over 30 seconds, and remove extra weight from your trunk. (More ideas are at www.fueleconomy.gov.)

- **Cut your travel miles by combining errands and carpooling to school, work, and events.** Carpooling lets you share the driving load, enjoy connecting with others — and use the carpool lane! Plus, if you trim enough miles, you could get a low-mileage insurance discount. Look for carpool buddies at www.511.org.

- **Get to know your public transit system,** to lower car maintenance costs and transform tense driving time into a chance to relax, read, and connect with new folks. It's also vital that we support this system, given today's government cutbacks. To get started, see my column at www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl2f.html.

- **Integrate non-car transportation into your regular schedule.** For example, once a week take the bus, bike, or walk to work or school. Biking and walking are also great for your health!

- **Minimize your commute distance when you get a new job or move to a new house.** Also explore doing some

work from home, even just a few days a week, to cut car expenses and free up time for family and other pursuits.

- **Trim your work travel,** by taking just essential business trips and only holding key group meetings. Explore options such as teleconferencing.

- **Encourage others to reduce their transportation impacts.** For instance, support carpooling to your next event with an online bulletin board. Or setup a reward program for employees who take non-car options to work.

- **Reduce your vacation fuel use.** Travel to and at your destination using public transit, bikes, or an eco-rental car. Look for a vacation spot with on-site amenities to minimize driving. Also consider vacationing near home. People from all over the world come here to enjoy the treasures we have, but we're often too busy to enjoy them. Staying locally also minimizes hassles and expense.

In next month's column, I'll discuss ways to reduce our *indirect* oil use — and how we can use this disaster to help make truly wise policy for the future.

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 about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

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Published in the *Sonoma County Gazette*, June 2010.

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