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Editor's Corner - Beyond Environmental Awareness

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Beyond Environmental Awareness

By now, most educated people must be aware that we are sitting on an environmental time bomb. Being *aware* of these problems is like knowing that a house is on fire somewhere in our city: we feel vaguely sad for those whose home is being destroyed, but the situation doesn't urgently demand our attention. We feel sure that someone else is taking care of the problem. Unfortunately, everyone seems to view our environmental difficulties as a fire in the distance — someone else's problem.

Assimilation occurs when we progress beyond vague awareness and realize that the burning home belongs not to someone across town or down the block, but to us and that we cannot escape. Earth is a small, lonely spaceship with finite resources and, as far as we know, it is the only planet capable of supporting human life. If our home burns down, we burn with it. Viewed this way, environmental problems begin to seem very urgent indeed.

Logically, if our house were burning, we would immediately *act* to put out the fire. Unfortunately, many of us are not acting to stop the fire of destruction raging on earth. We may feel overwhelmed by the complex, global nature of the problems and the power wielded by various destructive forces. In addition, we may feel that we simply do not have time to be involved, so we allow these issues to slide quietly to the backs of our minds as we get caught up in the struggle to provide for our everyday needs.

By doing so, we abandon an enormous reserve of power. Selling environmentally destructive products can be profitable only if consumers create a demand for them. Since businesses are motivated by profit, they will eventually cease to market products which endanger the earth if consumers resolutely refuse to buy them.

We can choose to buy recycled, recyclable and reusable products while avoiding those which are energy-intensive, excessively packaged or toxic, and these are only the first steps. Many excellent handbooks are available from bookstores and libraries to help us become environmental consumers. Two I have found helpful are *Save Our Planet: 750 Everyday Ways You Can Help Clean Up the Earth* by Dianè MacEachern and *The Green Consumer* by John Elkington et al.

We can make the task of becoming environmental consumers easier for ourselves by sharing our information and sources with our friends. In fact, let's begin right here. Since buying from local sources reduces energy consumed in transportation, please send us information about "green" products produced in Iowa, and we'll spread the word. Look for

items verifiably designed to be helpful to the environment, such as those made from a high proportion of post-consumer waste.

Learning to become an environmental consumer may seem difficult at first, and we may decide we are too busy to add anything to our list of concerns. This seems reasonable until we remember that a fire *is* raging in our home and that we can make significant progress against the fire if each one of us becomes an environmental consumer.

—*J.M.H.*

Speaking of Being Busy. . .

We must apologize for the delay in getting the Journal out to you. Among other difficulties, a computer "crash" necessitated sending the Journal outside the Academy office for typesetting. We are sure that the Winter issue will provide enjoyable reading, even in the Spring!

— *C.W.B.*