

9/4/07

## **To drive or not to drive...that is the question**

Guess what I did today! I rode my bike to work. Mission Road is somewhat difficult, what with all the driveways and roads that spill onto it, but I survived. We'll see if I make it home! I figured out recently that at \$3.00 per gallon, I spend \$88.00 a month or \$1,056 per year. I could think of a few different ways I would rather spend that kind of money! I figure I may as well ride my bike the 5.4 miles roundtrip to work as long as: I don't have any appointments or have anything to haul, the weather is still good, my waistline could use a little slimming, the price of gas is high, and I'm saving carbon emissions. I am making the air we breathe every day cleaner, by riding my bike instead of driving my, ahem, V8. I would love never needing a vehicle. Think of the gasoline, insurance, license and registration fees I would save! Not to mention the 1,056 pounds of carbon emissions from my Ford Taurus that my car emits annually, according to [www.terrapass.com](http://www.terrapass.com).

According to EPA reports, morning drive time traffic increases 30% at the beginning of the school year. In 1969, 48% of students between the ages of five and fifteen biked or walked to school. Compare that with the percentage of students doing the same in the year 2001: 15%, with only 1% biking to school. I'm sure there are a lot of reasons for the change, one being urban sprawl resulting in children living further from school. Some ways to reduce your "carbon footprint" to offset the increase in back-to-school driving: 1. Get the kids a reusable water bottle. The kind that doesn't leach plastic into the water is best. 2. Get them a reusable lunch bag. Think of all the paper bags you can save! A durable bag or box with a simple design is best. 3. If the kids are old enough to walk or bike to school, encourage them to do so. 4. Carpool. If you can't do it every day, try to at least carpool a few days a week.

In addition to the noxious emissions automobiles have, think of the land area that has been paved to make our commute smoother! In the years between 1945 and 1978, asphalted land area equates to 58 million acres. This is an area the size of both Ohio and Pennsylvania! Nearly half of the land that has been developed for highways and housing was at one time the most productive agricultural land. Clearly, this poses a problem, especially since population has doubled in the last 50 years!

Speaking of children, let's talk about more environmental impacts of an affluent standard of living. In 1994, Hall et. al. has estimated that a baby born today in this country will generate the following during its lifetime: 10,355 tons of waste water, 2.5 tons of waste oil and solvents, 13 tons of waste paper, 3 tons of waste metals, 3 tons of waste glass, as well as indirect wastes from manufacturing, including 439 tons of waste from agriculture, 419 tons from mining (coal excluded), 197 tons from the industrial sector, 83 tons of hazardous waste, 31 tons of demolition, 1,418 tons of carbon dioxide, and 19 tons of carbon monoxide. We accept five of these things at the Isabella County Recycling Center, and one other can be composted! Let's live more sustainably, every day. If you have questions about sustainability or recycling, please contact me at 989-773-9631 or [recycling@isabellacounty.org](mailto:recycling@isabellacounty.org). Happy Recycling!

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