

# HIS VIEW: 'Green' is starting to get a bit tedious

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I'm thinking that, to do something for the environment, I'm gonna buy me a Hummer. Let me explain.

Indisputably, we should be all good stewards of the Earth. No one wants rivers and lakes to be toilets or the air to be fouled with pollutants. Environmental zealots, though, narcissistically wrapped up in their own sense of preciousness, take a perfectionist approach to environmental issues, which is inevitably doomed to failure. With 6-plus billion people inhabiting this planet, resources are going to be used, stuff is going to be burned, and we're going to make messes.

Rather than turning environmentalism into a religion of pointless gestures, like cloth grocery bags, sane people take a different approach. They focus on what works at a cost that's reasonable.

A good example of the pointless gesture is the hybrid car. Hybrid cars get better gas mileage, so they must be better for the environment, no? Would that it were true. What drivers of hybrids fail to take into account are the cars' other environmental costs, and they're not pretty.

To make the batteries for a hybrid, nickel has to be mined, a highly energy-intensive activity. Worse, the areas surrounding nickel mines are environmental disasters; according to NASA, the one in Canada is a "dead zone" where toxic acid rain leads to soil erosion. Once the nickel is mined, it makes a trip around the world - to refineries in

Europe, then to China for further processing, then to the United States for battery production. All of this comes at a cost - what economists call "embedded costs" - to the environment.

The upshot is that the environmental cost of Al Gore's Prius is considerably more than that of the embodiment of environmental evil, the Hummer. When you add it all up, the per-mile "dust-to-dust" cost of a Prius, including all the embedded environmental costs, is about \$3.25. The Hummer, whose life span is about three times that of the Prius, has a per-mile "dust-to-dust" cost of about \$1.95. What's more, the per-mile cost of other nonhybrid cars on the market is lower still, as low as half a buck. Remember, we're not talking about direct outlays by the consumer. We're talking about the sum of the costs to the environment measured in dollars. Sorry, but if you buy a Hummer rather than a Prius, in the long run you'd actually be consuming fewer environmental resources, not more.

Bamboo provides another example. The word itself rings of "greenness." It grows faster than, say, oak, so it's become part of the "sustainability" creed. But the process of converting bamboo into lumber for floors or cabinets is again highly energy intensive, usually done in coal-fired plants. Further, the adhesives many bamboo manufacturers use contain formaldehyde, a carcinogen (though admittedly some is made with water-based adhesives), and little to no regard is given to workers' health or safety.

Virtually all of the bamboo we use comes from Asia. In most cases, it's cultivated on farms created by clear-cutting forests and other environmentally sensitive areas. Environmentalists like to rail against "monocultures," yet that's exactly what bamboo is. Further, the bamboo has to be transported thousands of miles, again at an environmental cost. Then, there's bamboo's lack of durability. It's brittle, so it scratches and dents easily. Some hardwood floors in U.S. homes have lasted decades, if not a century or more. Bamboo wears poorly, so it will have to be replaced, sooner rather than later.

And by the way, bamboo workers in Vietnam earn about \$80 a month - untold wealth compared to their counterparts in India, who earn about \$1 a day.

Maybe it's just me, but I'm growing a little weary of "green." We're told how to have a "green" Halloween or a "green" Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Shoot, now on top of it, they're telling us how to have a "green" St. Patrick's Day. (Oh, wait, no, forget that.)

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