

GLOBAL WARMING: BAN BILLBOARDS, BUY LESS, WORK LESS

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Ban billboards to prevent global warming?

The connection is more important than it looks. Billboards are about promoting consumption and concentrating wealth. Anything we consume involves energy in making, transporting, operating and disposal. Concentrating wealth creates inequity and intensifies impacts on larger and larger parts of our communities.

Remember when Governor Tom McCall ordered lights turned off on billboards, highway interchanges and empty office buildings during the 1974 Oil Crisis? It worked. It was important. As important as anything, it let people know that things were serious and we all needed to take action together.

Remember how gross it felt after 9/11 when President Bush told us it was our duty to go out and spend more? How wrong that felt?

All these things are tied together, and start moving us into understanding the positive changes involved with sustainability, peak oil and global warming.

So what happens if we don't have billboards screaming at us to go out and consume more? What happens if we actually buy less and consume less? Ahhh! I can feel it already. I don't have to get so exhausted just cleaning out the garage, or figuring out how to operate some new toy. Let's see . . . if we spend less, we can pay off some of our bills, and pay less finance charges. Less time shopping, and hauling, and dealing with "stuff". Less bad digestion from overeating. Maybe having a little more "free time".

But . . . but . . . don't we *need* to consume???? What happens if we don't?

Well, we use up fewer materials, we use up less energy, we reduce our trash piles, we reduce global warming, we reduce the amount of work needed to make all that stuff. Isn't all that good?

Ah, that's it. We'd be responsible for unemployment. We might lose our job. We might really cause problems.

Is it really a problem when less work is needed to create things we don't need or want? Do you know what Europeans did when they got into this situation? They chose to reduce the work week! So *everyone* got more free time, and unemployment was avoided. Amazing!

So working less is one real way to reduce energy use and reduce global warming, while making life better! French, German, Swedish and British workers work 25% fewer hours a year than Americans, while having greater productivity. That's the equivalent to three months more vacation every year. Repeat: three months more vacation every year. Gee, maybe we should spend some of that time seeing psychologists to understand why we were such "overdo" junkies.

There are lots of ways to spread needed work hours around other than mandating a shorter work week. Job sharing, time-off, early retirement, shorter days, fewer weeks of

work a year. Americans, absurdly, work more hours than any other industrialized country.

If we discourage excess working by progressive taxation, we give people the freedom to choose how much they work, while helping everyone be able to afford what we need.

Accumulating material possessions is a poor substitute for the deeper satisfactions of loving and being loved, contributing to and being valued by our communities, getting satisfaction from what we do, and having more time for deeper connections with family, friends, and the broader world around us. I'd call stopping being "consumption junkies" a real positive aspect of "global cooling". Almost any consumption consumes resources.

But think . . . sitting around like the French, cooling it with friends and a bottle of wine instead of overworking, we would also be cooling global warming, our trade deficit with China, and demand for commuting gasoline. And having fun in the process.

"Free time" doesn't need to be either sitting around being bored or frantically spending money and energy seeking entertainment. There are lots of wonderful ways to find rewards and satisfaction that don't involve money and energy.

Less working may mean less income. But also less outgo for taxes, "stuff" and crazy things like spending 20% of our incomes on finance charges from over-consumption. Our need in this country is not for more employment or more income. It's for living wages at the bottom end so people have fair and adequate income. It's for eliminating tax loopholes for the super-rich so they pay a fair share of the services and infrastructure needed in our communities and the load is not dumped on people with lower incomes.

Who said we can't eliminate billboards? The advertising industry? Duh. People who live in Vermont, Hawaii, Alaska, and Maine are laughing. All four states have totally eliminated billboards. So have hundreds of communities in other states, including a cleanup in Jacksonville FL that is removing over 1000 billboards. More cities, such as Houston, San Diego, and Little Rock, have banned the construction of new billboards.

Give ourselves back our personal space, our scenic countryside, our sense of balance. Time and attention to focus on what we really want out of life, and what we can give to others. Life is not a hot dog eating context.

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