



CONSERVANCY

NEWSLETTER NO. 3

NOVEMBER 2008

info@neutralfutures.com



Cry me a river

The threat to fresh water supplies from mining is in addition to growing alarm at the leakage of sewage into rivers and underground water systems. Concern about the water situation was echoed by Dr Morne du Plessis, the chief executive of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) in South Africa.

He said more than 98 percent of our freshwater supply was already accounted for, and that at current rates of supply and consumption, we'd run out of fresh water by 2025.

Add to that the pollution of our existing and dwindling water supply, and you have a national crisis that is a greater threat to our economy than anything else. Aside from the serious health issues, predictions are that at the current rate Johannesburg will be uninhabitable in 15 years time.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The granite kitchen that cost the earth could eventually kill you...



As the popularity of granite countertops has grown in the last decade — demand for them has increased tenfold, according to the Marble Institute of America, a trade group representing granite fabricators — so have the types of granite available. And with increased sales volume and variety, there have been more reports of “hot” or potentially hazardous countertops, particularly among the more exotic and striated varieties from Brazil and Namibia.

Indeed, health physicists and radiation experts agree that most granite countertops emit radiation and radon at extremely low levels.

With increasing regularity in recent months, the Environmental Protection Agency has been receiving calls from radon inspectors as well as from concerned homeowners about granite countertops with radiation measurements several times above background levels.

Environmental destruction and radiation



“We’ve been hearing from people all over the country concerned about high readings,” said Lou Witt, a program analyst with the agency’s Indoor Environments Division.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking and is considered especially dangerous to smokers, whose lungs are already compromised. Children and developing fetuses are vulnerable to radiation, which can cause other forms of cancer. Mr. Witt said the E.P.A. is not studying health risks associated with granite countertops because of a “lack of resources.”

Research scientists in Houston and at the New York State Department of Health are currently conducting studies of granite widely used in kitchen counters. William J. Llope, a professor of physics at Rice, said his preliminary results show that of the 55 samples he has collected from nearby fabricators and wholesalers, all of which emit radiation at higher-than-background levels, a handful have tested at levels 100 times or more above background.



TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

A typical 500 megawatt coal power plant produces 3.5 billion kWh per year. That is enough energy for 4 million of our light bulbs to operate year round. To produce this amount of electrical energy, the plant burns 1.43 million tons of coal.

One light bulb burning over 12 months consumes 876kwh of electricity , which will cost you about R245.00. But the real cost in emissions:

842kg of C02

2.3kg of nitrogen oxide, and 2.5kg of sulphur di-oxide – which causes acid rain.



Hello darkness my old friend



We've lit up the night as if it were an unoccupied country, when nothing could be further from the truth.

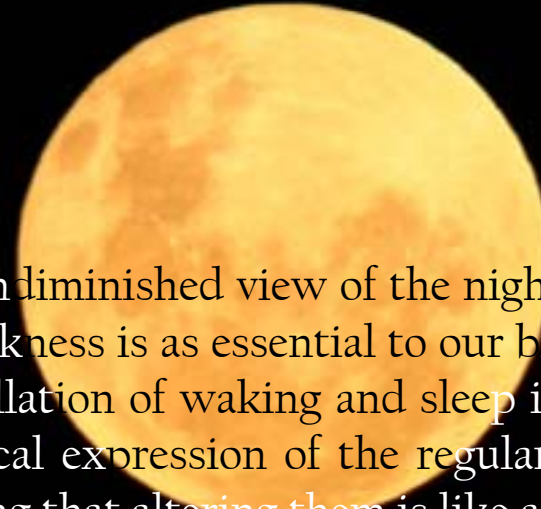
Among mammals alone, the number of nocturnal species is astonishing. Light is a powerful biological force, and on many species it acts as a magnet, a process being studied by researchers. The effect is so powerful that scientists speak of songbirds and seabirds being "captured" by searchlights on land or by the light from gas flares on marine oil platforms, circling and circling in the thousands until they drop. Migrating at night, birds are apt to collide with brightly lit tall buildings; immature birds on their first journey suffer disproportionately.

Insects, of course, cluster around streetlights, and feeding at those insect clusters is now ingrained in the lives of many bat species. In some Swiss valleys the European lesser horseshoe bat began to vanish after streetlights were installed, perhaps because those valleys were suddenly filled with light-feeding pipistrelle bats. Other nocturnal mammals—including desert rodents, fruit bats, opossums, and badgers—forage more cautiously under the permanent full moon of light pollution because they've become easier targets for predators.



Some birds sing at unnatural hours in the presence of artificial light. Scientists have determined that long artificial days—and artificially short nights—induce early breeding in a wide range of birds. And because a longer day allows for longer feeding, it can also affect migration schedules. Nesting sea turtles, which show a natural predisposition for dark beaches, find fewer and fewer of them to nest on. Their hatchlings, which gravitate toward the brighter, more reflective sea horizon, find themselves confused by artificial lighting behind the beach. Frogs and toads living near brightly lit highways suffer nocturnal light levels that are as much as a million times brighter than normal, throwing nearly every aspect of their behavior out of joint, including their nighttime breeding choruses. Of all the pollutions we face, light pollution is perhaps the most easily remedied. Simple changes in lighting design and installation yield immediate changes in the amount of light spilled into the atmosphere and, often, immediate energy savings.

Insomnia – the link



Unlike astronomers, most of us may not need an undiminished view of the night sky for our work, but like most other creatures we do need darkness. Darkness is as essential to our biological welfare, to our internal clockwork, as light itself. The regular oscillation of waking and sleep in our lives—one of our circadian rhythms—is nothing less than a biological expression of the regular oscillation of light on Earth. So fundamental are these rhythms to our being that altering them is like altering gravity. For the past century or so, we've been performing an open-ended experiment on ourselves, extending the day, shortening the night, and short-circuiting the human body's sensitive response to light. The consequences of our bright new world are more readily perceptible in less adaptable creatures living in the peripheral glow of our prosperity. But for humans, too, light pollution may take a biological toll. At least one new study has suggested a direct correlation between higher rates of breast cancer in women and the nighttime brightness of their neighborhoods.

In the end, humans are no less trapped by light pollution than the frogs in a pond near a brightly lit highway.

Courtesy National Geographic

Are you poisoning your family

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS:

Of the 17 000 petrochemicals available for home use, only 30% have been tested for their affects on human health and the environment. Of chemicals commonly found in homes, 150 have been linked to allergies, birth defects, cancer, and psychological abnormalities

Only 1% of toxins are required to be listed on labels, because companies classify their formulas as "trade secrets".

In the past 50 years more than 75 000 chemicals have been introduced into the environment. Today 300 synthetic chemicals are found in the bodies of humans

Bleach, paint stripper and carpet cleaners used in the home can cause wheezing and asthma in children.





GENERAL CLEANER – white vinegar, bicarbonate of soda and water - it even foams, and cleans just about anything.
ODOUR REMOVER – bi-carb - sprinkle it on carpets to soak up smells and then vacuum; place it in a cup in your fridge or cupboards

LOO FRESHENER –water mixed with essential oils, or just add plants to a room – they act as air filters

BASIC BLEACH - hydrogen peroxide (believe it or not, this is a totally biodegradable product – we were also surprised) available from chemists , it can, however, irritate the eyes, skin and mucous membranes, so use with care

OVEN CLEANER – dampen oven surfaces, sprinkle bi-carb over surfaces and leave overnight; for stubborn dirt, use steel wool

MILDEW ZAPPER – 2 tsp tea tree oil with 2 cups water – just spray on surface and leave

FURNITURE POLISH – ½ tsp olive oil & ¼ cup vinegar/lemon juice – wipe on furniture with a rag – olive oil also preserves wood

TOILET CLEANER – ¼ cup of bi-carb into toilet bowl, let it stand for about 30 mins and then scrub. You can use borax for tough stains (just keep this out of reach of little fingers)

WINDOW CLEANER – 2 tsp vinegar and 500 ml water, spray on windows and wipe dry with newspaper

CLOTHS AND TOWELS – paper towels and other disposable cleaning things like paper serviettes can be replaced with reusable cloths and micro-fibre cloths. These are easily cleaned and don't clog landfill. Try not to use sponges as these are not biodegradable, or use natural sponges instead.

CLEAN GREEN

Cost effective cleaning

Grapevine



The ongoing efforts to rid the estate of traps has seen an increase in the amount of guinea-fowl and francolin. New dikkop chicks and civets have been spotted by residents.



Ten peacocks have escaped from the cricket oval, having flown away after being brought here from the Oppenheimers' Brenthurst home. Please let us know and we'll fetch them