



# 28 Ways to be Greener in 2008

It's easy to do your part to improve  
the environment close to home

BY JODI ENGLE

**S**ilicon Valley stands as a beacon in the burgeoning green movement. Last October, San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed pledged to convert to 100 percent renewable electrical power and to plant 100,000 trees in the next 15 years. San Jose currently has a recycling rate of 62 percent, with a target of zero waste by the year 2022. These goals might sound ambitious, but we believe they're doable—that is, if each one of us works to help make the environment healthier. To set you on your way, we offer these 28 steps, most of which are easy to incorporate into your everyday routine.

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## Remember to Recycle

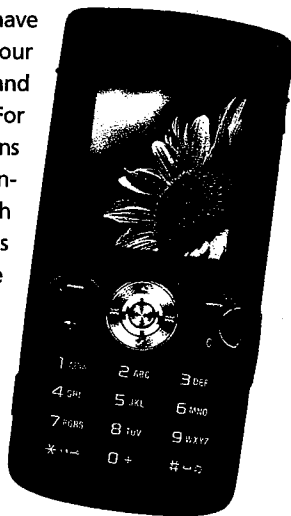
**1** The good news: San Jose recycles more household waste than any other large city in the United States, diverting two-thirds of its household trash from the city landfill. The not-so-good-news: We need to do more. Thousands of tons of reusable materials are still being tossed.

You can leave aluminum cans, glass bottles, paper, plastic, and tin cans for curbside pickup. Simply empty and rinse all containers, and flatten cartons and boxes. Recyclables don't need to be spotless, just not moldy or full of food. To find out how to dispose of other items from cooking oil to used motor oil, visit [www.sjrecycles.org](http://www.sjrecycles.org).

**2** Composting food waste and grass clippings can further reduce the amount of garbage being sent to the landfill, while creating nutrient-rich fertilizer for your garden. Many cities and San Mateo and Santa Clara counties offer composting workshops, bins (sometimes sold at a reduced price), and master composting programs.

## Reuse Everything

**3** Before recycling, consider whether your unwanted items still have some life left in them. Donate your old cell phone to Happy Hollow Park and Zoo (408.277.3065 or [www.hhpz.org](http://www.hhpz.org)). For every phone collected, the park earns funds from the nonprofit Eco-Cell, the environment is protected from waste such as mercury and lead, and the phones may be reused by nonprofits (be sure to protect your personal information by first removing your SIM card). Used books can be donated to a local library for resale; bikes in need of repair can be brought to the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition's collection site in Mountain View, where they're fixed and given to needy children (650.269.6051 or [www.svbcbikes.org](http://www.svbcbikes.org)); and large home-related items can be brought to the ReUse People's warehouse in Oakland (888.588.9490 or [www.thereusepeople.org](http://www.thereusepeople.org)).



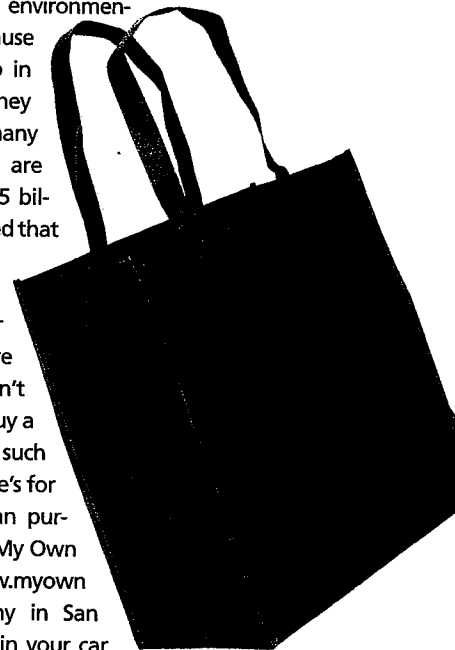
**4** Some items are not recyclable such as Styrofoam. Made from the petroleum-based plastic called "polystyrene," Styrofoam makes up, by volume, as much as 30 percent of landfills worldwide and doesn't biodegrade. Most pack-and-ship stores such as Mail Boxes Etc. and UPS accept clean Styrofoam peanuts for reuse in customer shipments. Call the Plastic Loose Fill Council's Peanut Hotline or visit its website (800.828.2214 or [www.loosefillpackaging.com](http://www.loosefillpackaging.com)) to find a local collection site.

**5** For everything else, join a free email listserv, in which you can post items to donate and search for free items, such as [www.freecycle.com](http://www.freecycle.com) or [www.local2me.com](http://www.local2me.com).

## Shop Smarter

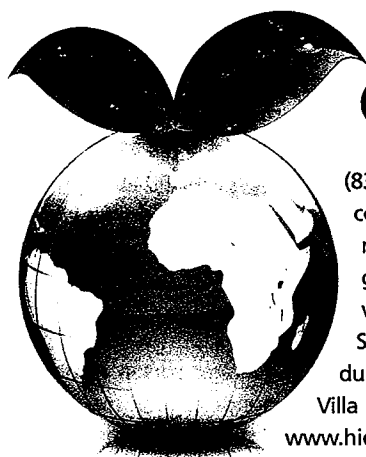
**6** Now that you're recycling and reusing more items, the next logical step is to get rid of waste altogether. Buy products in bulk at the grocery store, and use your own containers to hold contents when loading from large bins. If an item is unavailable in bulk, choose the largest size possible. Don't limit bulk purchases to food items. On its website, beauty company Aveda states that its liter-sized shampoo bottles "use 40 percent less plastic and cost 30 percent less than the equivalent product in regular size bottles. Larger sizes mean we have to produce and ship fewer bottles. This means we send out fewer trucks that emit CO<sub>2</sub>—the primary cause of global warming—into the atmosphere." The bottom line: you're helping your pocketbook and the planet.

**7** Plastic bags pose an environmental problem because they often wind up in trees or the bay where they can endanger wildlife. As many as 3 million barrels of oil are needed to produce the 27.5 billion plastic bags it is estimated that Californians use each year. San Francisco banned plastic bags a year ago, and other cities, including San Jose, are considering it, too. But don't wait for it to become law. Buy a reusable shopping bag now, such as the ones sold at Trader Joe's for \$1.99. Trendier shoppers can purchase stylish carry-alls from My Own Bag (415.503.0186 or [www.myownbag.com](http://www.myownbag.com)), a small company in San Francisco. Then stash them in your car for ready use.



## Eat for the Environment

**8** The word "locavore" was recently added to the Oxford English Dictionary, and it means someone who eats food grown or produced locally or within roughly a 100-mile radius of their home. A group ([www.locavores.com](http://www.locavores.com)) in San Francisco coined the word and is doing precisely that. Members are urged to eat local by shopping weekly at farmers' markets for one month. With locally grown and produced food available year-round in the Bay Area, there's no reason to eat food shipped from thousands of miles away. Another bonus is that most foods sold at farmers' markets are organic, which is good for you and the environment (if a stand doesn't carry the certified organic label, ask the vendor about his or her growing methods).



**9** Join a community-supported agriculture group such as Watsonville's Live Earth Farm (831.763.2448 or [www.liveearthfarm.com](http://www.liveearthfarm.com)), where for a monthly fee you receive a weekly assortment of farm-grown organic produce delivered to various pickup spots in Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey counties during the growing season. Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills (650.949.8650 or [www.hiddenvilla.org/csa.php](http://www.hiddenvilla.org/csa.php)) packs baskets

of organic fruits and vegetables once a week from mid-May through November and has pickup sites in Los Altos Hills, Mountain View, and Palo Alto.

**10** More convenient still, services such as Bay Area Organic Express (415.695.9688 or [www.organicexpress.com](http://www.organicexpress.com)) will bring a weekly box of fruit and vegetables to your door. Usually the food is well tagged with information on the farms from where it originates.

**11** No one's suggesting you go vegetarian, but eating less red meat and selecting pasture-raised beef whenever possible conserves resources. It can take up to 5,000 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef, and greenhouse gases from farming—especially those associated with livestock—account for roughly one-fifth of the total emissions worldwide, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. The Eat Well Guide ([www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org)) is a directory of small farms, searchable by ZIP code, where you can purchase meat that is pasture-raised and free of antibiotics and added hormones.

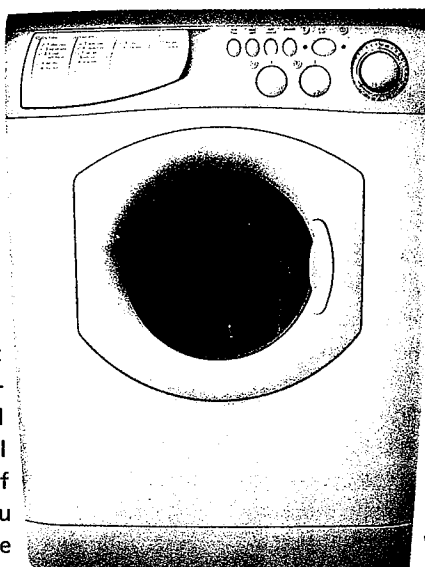
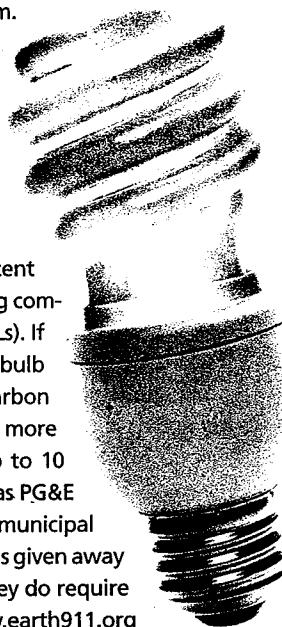
**12** Overfishing has brought many species of fish to the brink of extinction. To find out which fish are safe to eat, visit the Monterey Bay Aquarium's website and download a Seafood Watch guide ([www.mbayaq.org](http://www.mbayaq.org)), then take it with you to your fishmonger or out to restaurants.

## Stop Energy Zappers

**13** San Jose Mayor Reed has requested that residents cut their energy consumption in half during the next 15 years. This isn't difficult to do when you consider that a large power waster is lurking right under your nose. Many electrical devices remain on after they're turned off and continue to drain electricity. It's known as "vampire" standby power (because it sucks your power in the middle of the night). Plug multiple appliances and electronics into a power strip with a surge protector, and

flick the power off when you're not using them. Don't forget to unplug the chargers you use for cell phones, digital cameras, and iPods. You'll not only cut up to 10 percent from your electric bill, you'll also help clean the air—vampire power amounts to 1 percent of the world's carbon emissions.

**14** Replace ordinary incandescent light bulbs with the odd-looking compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). If every family in the United States replaced one bulb with a CFL, it would be like reducing the carbon emissions from 800,000 cars. Sure, they cost more (\$3 to \$4 a bulb versus \$1), but they last up to 10 times longer. Many government bodies such as PG&E and Silicon Valley Power (SVP), Santa Clara's municipal electric utility, offer rebates. Since 1998, SVP has given away more than 42,000 CFLs. They do require special disposal. Visit [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org) to find local recycling sites.

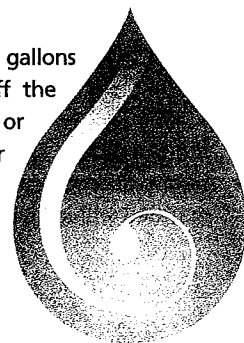


## Be Water Wise

**15** In the market for a new washing machine? Consider purchasing a front-loading model. These washers have the best overall performance, according to *Consumer Reports*, resulting in cleaner clothes using less water—one-third to one-half of the amount that top-loaders require. Within one year, you'll notice a savings of up to 6,450 gallons of water, \$100 in electricity, and \$54 on detergent costs. Santa Clara County residents can also apply for a \$100 to \$200 rebate from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD). Applications are available online at [www.waterenergysavings.com](http://www.waterenergysavings.com). For further

savings, load the washer to capacity and use cold water instead of warm or hot.

**16** The average faucet releases three gallons of water a minute. Shutting off the faucet while brushing your teeth or shaving can save hundreds of gallons of water a month. Conserve more by installing low-flow fixtures and aerators on kitchen and bathroom faucets and showerheads. To receive a free faucet aerator, call the SCVWD's hotline (408.265.2607 ext. 2554).



**17** Request a trained water surveyor to come to your home and review your water use. Call 800.548.1882 to schedule an appointment. The surveyor can supply you with free faucet aerators and information on rebates for low-flow toilets (ones that use less than 3.5 gallons per flush vs. the usual six).



**18** Return to tap water. When you buy a liter of water at the store, you're actually consuming six bottles. That's because when manufacturers make plastic bottles, they use five liters of water to cool the plastic. Use a water-filter pitcher such as Brita or an in-sink faucet filter, and, when away from home, carry a reusable water bottle with you. You'll also reduce the environmental impact of transporting bottled water to the grocer's shelf.

## Commute More Kindly

**19** If the price of gas hasn't led you to take your bike out of storage, perhaps this will: a four-mile trip by car adds 15 pounds of pollutants to the air. The beauty of biking is that it uses no nonrenewable fuels, only your own energy. If you're new to biking, download maps and be matched with an experienced "biking buddy" at [www.bicycling511.org](http://www.bicycling511.org). Equip your bike with saddlebags so you can tote groceries and other cargo, and, on weekends, ride to public events, such as Stanford University home football games, where there's valet bicycle parking. The Dutch conduct 30 percent of all their trips—to work, on errands, and for recreation—by bike. In the United States, that figure is less than 1 percent.



**20** After riding your bike, taking public transit is the next best option. Two main transit agencies serve the South Bay: Caltrain ([www.caltrain.org](http://www.caltrain.org)) runs along the peninsula from San Francisco to Gilroy, and Valley Transportation Authority light rail has stops throughout San Jose and connects to Mountain View and Campbell ([www.vta.org](http://www.vta.org)). Download maps and schedules from their websites, and carry them with you.

**21** Consider carpooling. It means one less car on the road emitting pollution and offers the chance to socialize with coworkers or make new friends. To get started, visit the San Mateo County Carpool Incentive Program's website ([www.commute.org](http://www.commute.org)), where you can apply to receive a \$60 gas card and be matched with carpool partners.

## Tune Up Your Car—And Your Driving

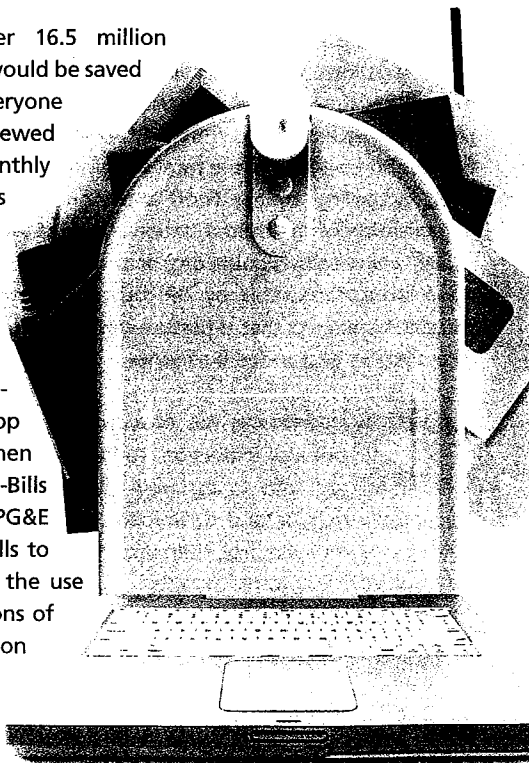
**22** If you haven't bought the latest hybrid, there's still much you can do with your old wheels. Keep tires properly inflated, and tune up your car according to your owner's manual schedule. You'll raise your car's fuel efficiency anywhere from 4 to 40 percent.

**23** You can become more fuel-efficient by changing your driving habits. Namely, stop speeding (fuel efficiency peaks at 55 mph)—you'll save gas, be safer, and maybe even stay calmer. The latter has an added benefit: Driving aggressively with fast acceleration and hard stops can lower gas mileage by as much as 33 percent.

## Lose the Paper Trail

**24** The average person receives 41 pounds of junk mail and catalogs each year, and nearly half of that goes to the landfill unopened. The Federal Trade Commission ([www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)) and the Direct Marketing Association ([www.dmachoice.org](http://www.dmachoice.org)) spell out how to remove your name from mailing lists. Log on to [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com) to stop receiving those pesky pre-approved credit card offers. You'll save trees, water, and emissions, while also protecting your identity from theft and fraud. If everyone in the United States reduced the amount of junk mail in their mailbox, 100 million trees would be spared each year.

**25** Another 16.5 million trees would be saved if everyone in this country viewed and paid their monthly bills online. This convenience is becoming fairly common; just check with your cable, cell-phone, and car insurance companies. PG&E will stop sending you bills when you enroll in its e-Bills program. In 2006, PG&E sent 6.5 million e-Bills to customers, avoiding the use of more than 165 tons of paper. Another option is to receive and pay your bills in one place with an online service such as PayTrust ([www.paytrust.com](http://www.paytrust.com)).



**26** ATM receipts? Don't bother. If everyone in the country left their receipts in the machine, it would save a roll of paper more than 2 billion feet long—enough to circle the equator more than 15 times.