



The Daily Gleaner

Back to the School of Three R's

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Like most students living in residence at UNB back in the early 80's, I ate most of my meals in the men's dining hall. Once a year, the staff would display all of the food wasted that day at one end of the hall. It was not a pleasant sight to say the least. But the image of that food stays with me today, having left a lasting impression and a clear message — do not waste food! My current weight can attest to the fact that I took that message seriously.

Wasting food, wasting anything for that matter, affects the environment. Growing, processing and preparing food requires energy. If the food is wasted, then that energy is wasted, increasing the impact on climate change. This is certainly not meant as license to eat everything and anything before you. If that was the case, I would soon be swamped with e-mails from every dietician and nutritionist in Fredericton.

In just another week or so, thousands of students will be returning to school. Thousands of meals will be consumed at schools every day. Thousands of pieces of paper will be used and tossed out every day. And, thousands of kilometres will be driven every day to ferry our kids to school. This all adds up to a substantial environmental impact.

The three R's; reduce, reuse and recycle, can help lower the environmental impact associated with the school year.

Let's start with the litterless lunch. A typical lunch usually includes a drink, a sandwich (or equivalent), something healthy (we hope), and some kind of goody (probably not as healthy). Using a refillable drinking bottle instead of recyclable bottles or boxes helps reduce waste and energy, even if it is recycled. Remember, energy is still needed to recycle bottles and make them into something else, and it takes much less energy to wash a refillable bottle each night.

Using reusable containers for sandwiches and other goodies also helps contribute to a litterless lunch. And, at the same time, using these containers reduces the cost of plastic wrap for the year. Gone are the days of my Brady Bunch lunch box, but there are plenty of reusable, insulated lunch bag options today that eliminate the need for plastic or paper lunch bags. Not only will you help your pocket book by packing a litterless lunch, you will also reduce your impact on climate change.

These are just a couple of things that individual students can do to minimize waste and help the environment.

But what can your classroom do? Or your school? There are numerous ways students at every grade level can help reduce our environmental impact.

Perhaps every student in Fredericton could each plant a tree, which alone would offset thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. Is there a committed high school or university student out there who is just itching to take on such a project?

Do you know a student (or group of students) who would like to create and produce an environmentally themed play?

Perhaps the elementary schools in the city could have an environmental art or poster competition, with winner's artwork being posted on the Green Matters web site www.greenmattersfredericton.com.

Why not plan a school-based community recycling challenge and set a goal for generating the 'least amount of waste for a week' competition?

Environmental curriculum is improving every year in our schools. But we can always do more – whether it is how students take their lunch to school or by giving students the opportunity to 'go beyond' and make a difference outside of the classroom.

Green Matters is the City of Fredericton's program to help households, business and institutions reduce greenhouse gas emissions, helping the City be the first to achieve Kyoto targets in Canada.

It's new year. A fresh start for teachers and students. Let's make a fresh start at getting serious about protecting our environment. Let us know of your school-based environmental initiatives so we can help spread the word, as well as feature and track the progress of your efforts on our Green Matters web site.

Peter Corbyn is the founder of www.earthinstitute.ca and www.greenenergychallenge.com.