



The Daily Gleaner

February 21, 2009

Insulating Yourself from Risk – Part II

Last week's column focused on reducing economic and environmental risk in your life through changing buying habits and decisions in major expenditure areas – your house, home energy sources, and your vehicle. The column touched on the goal of reducing overall debt as well as monthly financial commitments as our economy moves through this period of decline. And this economic scenario is coupled with environmental and climate change impacts that will increasingly affect the cost and supply of traditional sources of energy for our homes and vehicles, as well as our food sources and other necessities for everyday living.

Interestingly, Statistics Canada recently released their Households and the Environment Survey, which provides a window into how the sustainable practices and behaviours of Canadians are changing. The survey shows that increasing numbers of Canadian households are taking action to reduce their energy and water usage and that, more than ever before, a sense of environmental responsibility is driving these changes.

On that note, this week's column focuses on the smaller decisions and habits we can adjust in order to reduce our risk related to both environmental and economic instability in the coming months and years.

First, small-scale home projects seem to be a constant in a homeowner's life – everything from replacing windows and doors, to toilets and appliances. The Statistics Canada survey found that approximately 15 percent of our annual household income is spent on home energy use. That's equivalent to \$15 of every \$100 earned – which underlines how important it is to implement energy-efficiency measures at home. So, if any of your appliances need to be replaced, make it a priority to choose Energy Star replacements. Energy Star is an international symbol of energy efficiency and in Canada is affixed to the EnerGuide label so the buying public can compare the energy consumption of products sold in Canada. Energy efficient choices can save families about a third of their energy bill with similar savings of greenhouse gas emissions, without sacrificing features, style or comfort. For more information on Energy Star go to the Office of Energy Efficiency website at www.oeenrcan.gc.ca/energystar.

If you want to be an economic and environmentally aware consumer – do your research! For instance, if you are buying new windows, make sure they are the most energy efficient ones for your home and climate. Windows for cold and moderate climates are designed to keep heat in and have a low “U-value”. U-value measures insulation ability or the amount of heat loss through a material, so the lower the U-value the better. Another factor to consider is the “E-value” of the glass (a glazing applied to one of the glass surfaces or suspended between the panes). Low-E stands for low-emissivity, which prevents heat from escaping and is best for our climate. Ensure your new windows are double-paned and are rated with both low U- and E-values (ideal low E- and U-values are 0.35 or less).

Next, let's look at consumption habits. The simple rule is don't 'overbuy' – whether it is food or other perishables that end up being wasted; or extraneous 'stuff' for yourself, your family or your house that is often wasted or ends up in the landfill. This means, when you buy, buy quality so it lasts and doesn't have to be replaced as frequently. We often forget that the first and most important of the '3 Rs' is reduce, then reuse and recycle. This approach helps your wallet in the long run and you quickly get used to not buying those extra 'nothings' that really do not add to your quality of life or your health.

The current economic and environmental situation surrounding us can be overwhelming at times, but there is no need to feel powerless. There are many ways we can change and adapt our lifestyles to the 'new world'. So in addition to analyzing our large financial decisions, making immediate changes in our day-to-day decisions can also help insulate us from future risk and uncertainty.

We are wise enough to know that our eco-friendly choices will not solve the world's problems, but remember the conscientious person's adage; 'if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem'. And in addition to the environmental benefit of making these choices, they can also help lessen the impact of volatile outside forces that threaten our financial security. So, just breathe, set a new plan and begin your change.

Sonya Hull is a local consultant and Project Manager for Fredericton's Green Matters campaign (and an Economist only when necessary!). If you have topics you would like the Green Matters writers to cover in this column, please e-mail us at greenmatters@fredericton.ca. To read past columns go to www.greenmattersfredericton.ca and click on the 'Green Matters in the Gleaner' button.