

Climate Corner

I hate paper straws, too.

by Ashley Ropp

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When you hear the words 'green', or 'eco-friendly', what do you think of? Tesla's that you could never afford? Soggy paper straws ruining your drink? Companies trying to install towering windmills in our fields?

I believe these mainstream ideas of being eco-friendly are part of the reason many people are put off from environmental and climate action; they're unaffordable, inconvenient, and invasive. These might be the reasons *you* oppose 'going green'. Before you write this article off, don't worry, I'm not going to try and convince you otherwise. In fact, I'm going to tell you a secret: I *hate* paper straws, too.

This isn't because of cognitive dissonance. It's because I believe in a different picture of sustainability; a world that's not only green, but also *doesn't suck*.

The mainstream perspective tells us that there's only one path forward, where we switch out all gas vehicles for electric, fossil fuels for renewables, plastic for paper, and we'll be on our merry way. Many people oppose this path because it's a huge pain in the butt. What you may not realize, is that it's not *only* a pain in the butt, it's also **not a genuine solution**.

This is because of a number of reasons. One of these reasons being that it is literally impossible for us to switch out all non-renewable energy sources for renewables. And yes, I'm aware of the headlines boasting about the increase in renewable energy, such as the article from the World Economic Forum stating that in 2023, global renewable capacity increased by 50%. That's a lot! But what those headlines *don't* mention is that while the usage of renewable energy is increasing, so is our overall energy demand. If renewable energy capacity doubles in a year, but so does total energy demand, the ratio of renewable to non-renewable stays the same - and that's exactly the case. According to the Energy Institute's Statistical Review of World Energy, "global fossil fuel consumption and energy-related emissions hit record highs in 2023, as demand for fossil fuels increased despite a large increase in renewable generation." And while this is progress, it is still miles behind where we need to be.

Another issue with this mainstream perspective is that we also need to account for the energy and resources needed to produce the infrastructure that is needed for these renewable solutions. Electric vehicles are a great example of this. EV's are viewed as a holy grail sustainable solution; all we need to do is make more! And while EV's produce less emissions while driving, they still need to be manufactured. Imagine we build enough plants to manufacture enough EV's to replace all gas vehicles currently being used **as well as** keep up with the growing demand. Now, imagine the energy demand that would come with that.

EV's also need specific minerals- namely cobalt- for the batteries. The mining of these minerals is another factor contributing to biodiversity loss and emissions, in turn, worsening climate change. And that's not even talking about the humanitarian crisis that is the cobalt mining industry.

As for paper straws- come on, I don't even need to explain this one. Why are you giving me a paper straw in a plastic cup?

All that's to say, it's okay if you don't agree with the mainstream ideas of fighting climate change. There are so many 'solutions' out there that aren't really fixing the problem, just pretending they are.

But we can't just leave it there! There's still a problem to be solved! And lucky for us, there are tons of solutions that would not only actually work, but would also **improve** our quality of life. Some of these solutions include lowering energy demands, filling the remaining demand with renewables, caring for our ecosystems, boycotting and divesting from unsustainable industries, and adjusting our infrastructure. Instead of imagining a world with EV's and soggy packaging, imagine a world with lower energy demand because we don't have eight pizza places in one town. Imagine a world with accessible, good quality public transportation, so not everyone *needs* to drive all the time. A world where food is grown locally, making it more affordable *and* higher quality. A world where the local ecosystems are maintained and cared for, increasing air quality, encouraging biodiversity, and giving the community beautiful spaces where we can spend time enjoying nature.

I certainly don't have all the answers, but I do know this - **sustainability does not have to be a dreadful thing**. So what I encourage you to take from this article is permission to imagine a better future, a future that makes you excited. Think about the green solutions you agree with, and the ones you don't. What are our other options? What does **your** sustainable future look like?

Climate Corner represents Nith Valley Eco Boosters. NVEB is a local group committed to achieving and supporting a long-term healthy environment in Wilmot and Wellesley Townships through education, action and collaboration. To help envision and create your sustainable future, visit nvecoboosters.com. Climate Corner will include NVEB updates and how you can get involved or support us.