

Sustainability Notes

RE SOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

SPRING 2008

OF LATE, I have been pondering the notion of “appropriate technology” and its implications to sustainability. A term long-used in international development circles, appropriate technology (AT) is simply technology that is appropriate to the environmental, social and economic circumstances of the user. I first became aware of the term 25 years ago when working in an organization that was developing appropriate technologies for use in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution. In its usual meaning, AT generally requires few environmental and economic resources. For example, solar ovens are used increasingly in southern nations. They provide a cleaner cooking environment for women who have generally cooked with wood, coal or dung, are quite efficient and are relatively inexpensive. AT may not always be low-tech, however, as recent use of LED lights to provide a clean reliable alternative to kerosene in remote villages of Nepal can attest.

I wonder what might happen if we wealthy westerners embraced the concept of AT for ourselves. What if, each day, we simply chose the technology most appropriate to the task at hand? Such a technology would be no more than what was needed. For example, if I want to tap a picture hook into the wall, I probably would not pull out a pneumatic nail gun, but would find a small hammer with which to complete my task.

If I need to get across town, doing so by dump truck would not be appropriate. Nor, perhaps, would doing so by SUV or even a small auto. My feet would be a nice choice, but if I did not have time, then a bicycle would be a lovely, appropriate choice. If I need to stop at the grocery, perhaps I could put my purchases in a basket or bike bags. If it is a big grocery shop, then perhaps I'll take my bike trailer. But, if I need to go make a major purchase of cabinets at the RE Store, then a truck is the appropriate choice.

If I have a lawn to mow, a human-powered push mower would be a very appropriate choice. If I have a larger lawn, perhaps an electric mower would be appropriate. Do I really need to fire up a big gas engine to cut some grass? Seems like over-kill in the technology department, to me.

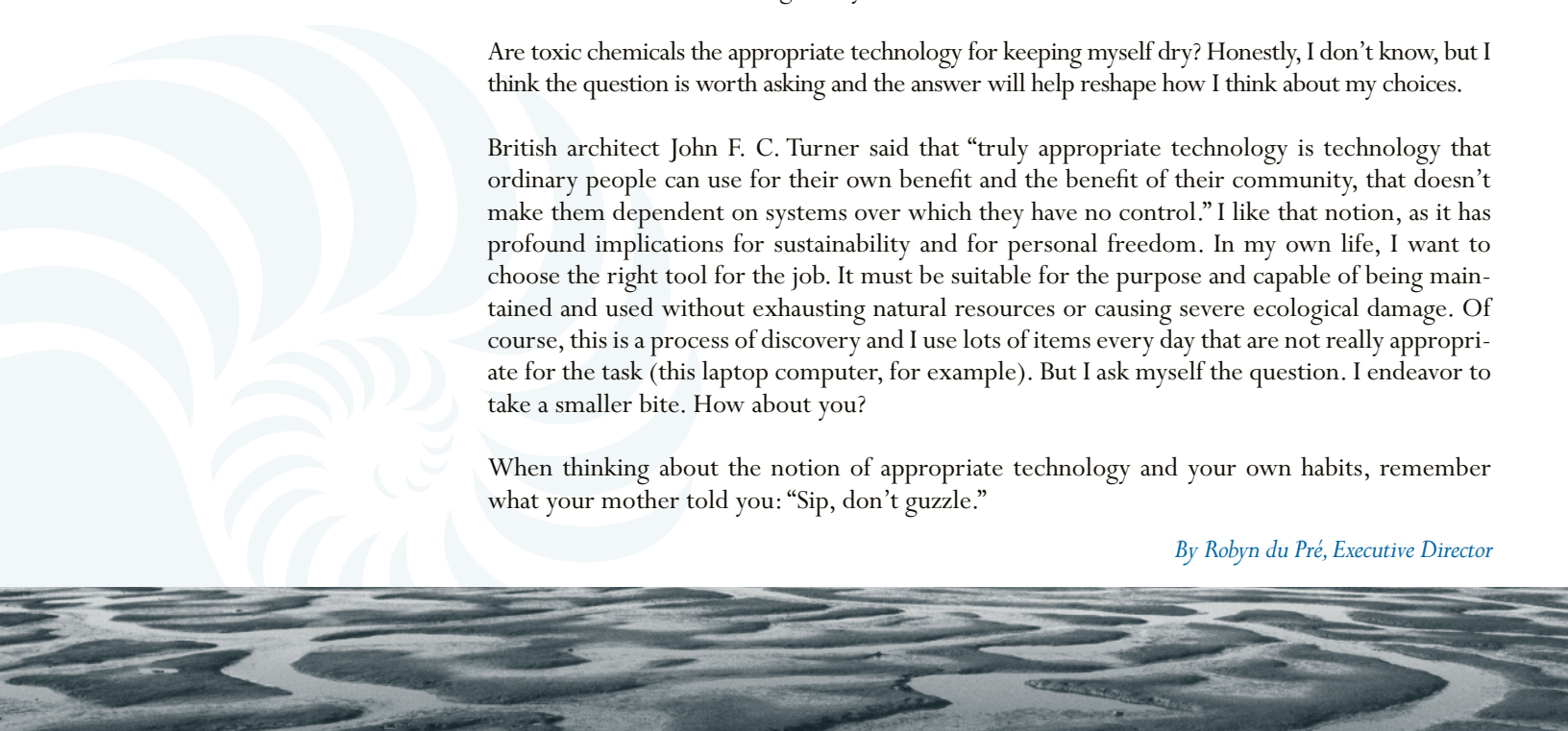
Recently I have been re-thinking the fancy high-tech outdoor clothing that I wear. My rain coat, for example, is treated with Teflon, which is a brand name for tetrafluoroethylene / polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE). These are highly toxic and persistent compounds that are released into the environment and never go away. Hmmm.

Are toxic chemicals the appropriate technology for keeping myself dry? Honestly, I don't know, but I think the question is worth asking and the answer will help reshape how I think about my choices.

British architect John F. C. Turner said that “truly appropriate technology is technology that ordinary people can use for their own benefit and the benefit of their community, that doesn't make them dependent on systems over which they have no control.” I like that notion, as it has profound implications for sustainability and for personal freedom. In my own life, I want to choose the right tool for the job. It must be suitable for the purpose and capable of being maintained and used without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage. Of course, this is a process of discovery and I use lots of items every day that are not really appropriate for the task (this laptop computer, for example). But I ask myself the question. I endeavor to take a smaller bite. How about you?

When thinking about the notion of appropriate technology and your own habits, remember what your mother told you: “Sip, don't guzzle.”

By Robyn du Pré, Executive Director





AS PART OF an organization-wide focus on climate change, RE Sources is launching our new **be cool** program. This innovative, community-wide campaign promotes actions that each of us can implement to personally combat climate change. To be part of the “cool” crowd, log onto www.imcool.info, cruise the website, register with the campaign and learn how easy it is to turn the tide on your carbon emissions.

By registering on our website, you’ll get the low down on how to **be cool** and become part of the movement toward a healthy, energy-efficient, and more sustainable Whatcom County. We’ll send you a groovy monthly e-newsletter including current news, community events, and some far-out action tips that will help you go retro with your carbon dioxide output. Now that’s cool, man!

Come visit the hip, new **be cool** traveling display and learn about climate change, sign up with the campaign and even buy your own **be cool** t-shirt, worn by hipsters everywhere. Look for us at your favorite summer event such as the Farmer’s Market, Downtown Sounds, and Concerts in the Park. Join this hot new movement and start to **be cool!**



The Fountain Plaza awaits renewal across the street from our Bellingham location.

Fountain Plaza: A Community Created Park

EMPLOYING THE TOOLS of place-making, RE Sources has been working with representatives of three Bellingham neighborhoods to re-create Fountain Plaza. Together, our group has developed initial designs to convert this little public space into a community hub, complete with historical elements, enhanced seating, and landscaping. We hope to create a place where people can meet, take pause and enjoy a moment in a place where 3 neighborhoods converge. This group of neighbors is now finalizing plans and raising funds to help finance the project. Thanks to the City of Bellingham for a grant to assist with this ongoing process. If you’d like to help, contact Jason Darling via email at jason@re-store.org or phone at (360) 734-7161

RE Sources and the North Sound Baykeeper Host a Special Summer Luncheon with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Thursday, June 26, doors open at 11:30
Hotel Bellwether Waterside Terrace



RE Sources’ North Sound Baykeeper is co-hosting the national Waterkeeper Alliance conference this June in Seattle. Waterkeepers from all over the world will come together for four days to learn from one another and discuss strategy. As a part of this exciting event, the president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., will visit us in Bellingham for a special fundraising luncheon to benefit our Baykeeper. An inspiring international spokesperson for the Waterkeeper Alliance and attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, Mr. Kennedy will discuss local and regional clean water issues and highlight the work of Waterkeepers throughout the world, including our own North Sound Baykeeper.

Tickets for this special fundraiser are \$50 per person which includes a salmon lunch.

For more information visit www.re-sources.org.

Tickets will sell out fast so purchase your tickets early at Village Books or the Bellingham RE Store.

Thanks to the following for their generous sponsorship
Cornerstone sponsors: Sanitary Service Company, Barron Green Team and DreamMakers NW

Sustaining Sponsors: Brown and Cole Stores, Kulshan Cycles, Birch Equipment, Sterling Real Estate Group

Supporting Sponsors: Ryzex, Chicago Title Insurance Co., Village Books, BayPort Financials, WECU, Rice Insurance, 2020 Engineering, Countrywide Home Loans, Farrallon Consulting and Rocket Donuts

What's in the water?

By Wendy Steffensen,
North Sound Baykeeper



photo: Wendy Steffensen

What can we do to protect the bay?

- Compost your food waste instead of using your garbage disposal.
- Use non-toxic household cleaners, especially those made from simple ingredients at home.
- Take all unwanted chemicals and pharmaceuticals to the Disposal of Toxics facility, located at 3505 Airport Drive.

Thanks to the intrepid souls who contributed to this feat of calculation:

Doug Stark
Ann Stark
Sidney Funsin
Lilly McGarry
Wendy Steffensen

Visit www.re-sources.org to download a copy of the report.

* Accounting for all of the waste entering Bellingham Bay is not possible at this time. Data does not exist to quantify the amount of waste entering the bay via stormwater, although we know that stormwater discharges account for 1/3 of the pollution in water bodies!

THE BAYKEEPER TEAM recently undertook the feat of calculating how much pollution is entering Bellingham Bay, and what a feat it was!

After compiling information from the Washington State Department of Ecology's (Ecology) pollution discharge permits and summing the amount of pollution discharged, we found that the majority of waste flushed into the bay each year that we can account for* comes from wastewater treatment plants. This is not surprising, given the fact that the treatment plants for the cities of Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, and Everson treat the wastewater from most of the homes, businesses and industrial facilities in the Bellingham Bay watershed.

What was surprising, however, was the volume of some pollutants including total suspended solids (TSS), biological oxygen demand (BOD) and zinc

that remain in the water even after treatment. TSS is a measurement of the amount of suspended solids in the water; these include sediment, and can be organic or inorganic. BOD is a measurement of the presence of organic material that, when it degrades, consumes oxygen. Zinc is a heavy metal contaminant that is very toxic to some aquatic organisms.

Records show that approximately **690,000 pounds of TSS, 640,000 pounds of BOD, and 160,000 pounds of zinc are being released into the bay each year.** Of this, 84% of the TSS and BOD and nearly 100% of the zinc comes directly from the wastewater treatment plants. What are the consequences of this? Unfortunately, no one knows.

The TSS and BOD from wastewater plants are made up of, among other things, digested plant and animal matter, solvents, metals, pharmaceuticals, and other chemicals. Throughout the treatment process, some of this material gets converted into harmless bacteria and some gets removed by screening and settling processes. Another portion, however, passes through the wastewater plant unchanged.

The nutrients of carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus are components of the organic material in the TSS and BOD. When these nutrients are added to an aquatic system, studies show that they can fuel the growth of bacteria and algae. This poses a problem when the algae then bloom and die off, thus robbing the aquatic system of needed oxygen. The lack of dissolved oxygen can alter the types and abundance of the organisms that live in the bay, especially those that live in deeper water, and can kill fish outright.

Although we can predict the effects of such pollution in general terms, it's too soon to know what toll, if any, the TSS and BOD will take on the life in Bellingham Bay. Additional study is needed to assess the levels of dissolved oxygen in the bay at different depths and seasons. Further research should also determine how much TSS and BOD can be added to the bay before the levels of dissolved oxygen and the diversity of biological life are significantly impacted.

In addition to these nutrients, our wastewater is introducing pharmaceuticals, plasticizers, and pesticides into the bay which are hazardous, even in very minute amounts. It has been shown that some of these chemicals mimic the hormone estrogen and have been linked to the feminization of male fish. Other chemicals known as perfluorinated compounds, which are added to products to make them non-stick and stain resistant, have been shown to weaken the immune system and cause liver damage in a variety of lab animals and wild turtles. Our use of industrial-age chemicals and pharmaceuticals has put the ecosystem, and consequently us, at risk because wastewater treatment plants are not technologically advanced enough to remove or disarm them.

Clearly, much of the waste entering Bellingham Bay has the potential to negatively affect its fishes and other life. Although the severity of these effects is not known for Bellingham Bay, it is likely that increased loading of pollutants will put Bellingham Bay at further risk.

From The Dean

By Dean Fearing,
RE Store Director



Clockwise from top-left: The original RE Store opened in 1993 with 3 staff members and 1 truck. The Holly Street RE Store celebrates its 5 year anniversary. The interior of the Holly Street store.

THIS SUMMER THE Bellingham RE Store will celebrate its fifteenth anniversary. Like all milestones, this anniversary has me reflecting on our past. I wonder how many of you remember our original location on the Guide Meridian (currently Sleep Country). I also wonder how many people would believe how far we would come. For those of you who didn't visit our first store, it was a darkly-lit, 6,400 square foot space. Lamps hung from extension cords in the ceiling and many of our materials were in a warehouse that was only accessible via a back alley. Back then we had only 6 staff that did every job; running the store, doing pick ups and salvaging materials.

Now we have two stores with over 30,000 square feet of floor space. We reach over 120,000 people every year by providing a one-of-a-kind shopping experience coupled with a host of field services. Our staff has grown to over 40, and our fleet of trucks can be seen working in locations as far away as Montana and Oregon.

Since the RE Store started in 1993, we've kept over 30,000,000 pounds of material from the landfill, a number that we can proudly say grows each year. We've started taking houses apart by hand to save even more material for reuse. We've become fixtures in the communities of Bellingham and Ballard. We're recognized as more than just a place to save money on building materials. And people are proud to use our materials in their homes.

Another exciting change happened last year when we purchased our own building for the Bellingham store. Our new home will be much more than the RE Store, it will also be the region's first Sustainable Living Center. Not only will our customers be able to buy used building materials, but they will also see displays for living more sustainably. Over the coming years we will be greening our building by adding solar panels, green roofs, gardens and much more.

While it's true that we've changed over the years, some things have stayed the same: our committed staff, our excellent customer service, our incredible and supportive customers and our mission of saving as much material from the landfill as possible.

Here's to the next fifteen years!

Join us on July 19th from 2-5 for our 15th anniversary party and grand opening of the Sustainable Living Center.

The festivities will include live music, displays, mini golf and much more!

Thanks to the following for their generous sponsorship.

Cornerstone Sponsor: DreamMakers NW

Sustaining Sponsor: Birch Equipment

Supporting Sponsors: Countrywide Home Loans, Farrallon Consulting and Rocket Donuts

JOIN and GIVE

Please select the amount you would like to give: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ Other _____

This donation is for: ☐ General membership support ☐ Sustainable Living Center

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

PAYMENT METHOD

☐ My check, made payable to RE Sources, is enclosed. ☐ Please charge my credit/debit card

☐ I prefer to make monthly or quarterly donations with my credit/debit card. I understand I can cancel at any time with a simple phone call.

☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly donation of:

☐ \$10 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ Other _____

Please charge my ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Card No: _____ Expiration Date: _____ Signature: _____

Save paper and a stamp! Visit www.re-sources.org/join-donate.htm and click on the "donate now" button to make a gift with your debit/credit card via our secure online website.

Economic Stimulus Rebate – Consider a Stimulating Investment in Community!

By Bernadette Castner, Development Director

CHANCES ARE YOU have already received your federal "economic stimulus payment" from the Federal Government. The hope is that the rebate will help strengthen the middle class, create jobs and turn our economy around for the better. In simple terms, the goal of this rebate is to put some extra money into the hands of us, the average Americans, so that we will spend it. So, what will you do with yours?

You could stimulate our local economy by buying that special something that you've been admiring. You could stimulate another town's economy by spending it on a vacation or plane reservations. You could stimulate your home economy by paying off some debt or saving it for a rainy day. Or, you could stimulate community by investing in the work of a local non-profit organization, such as RE Sources.

By donating even a portion of your economic stimulus check to RE Sources, you'll be supporting a growing movement for community sustainability. You'll educate some school children about how they can be environmental stewards. You will train a Beach Naturalist volunteer who will help beach users love area shorelines without loving them to death. Your investment will help the Baykeeper patrol area waterways, looking for pollution and habitat degradation. Or your stimulus investment can help pay for educational workshops and displays at the new Sustainable Living Center. Investing in a community organization such as RE Sources is an investment in the future of our most special places: places that we want our children to be able to enjoy.

RE Sources' programs are supported through your membership dollars. Your donations help initiate innovative programs, respond to community concerns and create a sustainable community.

Please consider donating a portion of your economic stimulus rebate or tax return to RE Sources for Sustainable Communities and stimulate the preservation and sustainability of our special community.



RESources

for Sustainable Communities

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Upcoming Events

Lunch with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

June 26 12:00-1:30,
Hotel Bellwether Ballroom
Purchase tickets at the
Bellingham RE Store or Village Books.

RE Store 15th anniversary and Grand opening of the Sustainable Living Center

July 19, 2:00-5:00,
Bellingham RE Store

Green Drinks:

Every first Wednesday
from 5-7pm:
June 4, July 2, August 6
Check our website
for location:
www.re-sources.org

Thanks to the following:

Sanitary Service Company
Barron Green Team
Kulshan Cycles
Brown and Cole stores
Sterling Real Estate Group
WECU
Ryzex

Chicago Title Insurance Co.
Village Books
BayPort Financials
Rice Insurance
2020 Engineering
Birch Equipment
Village Lighting
CB Wholesale Inc

Appliance Depot
Favinger Plumbing
Bay City Supply
DreamMakers NW
Farrallon Consulting
Countrywide Home Loans
Rocket Donuts

The Whatcom Community Foundation for a grant to support our *be cool* campaign.

Printed on FSC certified,
100% post consumer
recycled paper, generated
with wind power



By using this paper, RE Sources preserved
1.95 trees for the future, saved 828
gallons of wastewater, prevented 180 lbs
of greenhouse emissions and kept 92 lbs
of solid waste from disposal.