

Mid-Columbia group says going green can save cash too

Ingrid Stegemoeller, Herald staff writer

Kermit the Frog might think being green isn't easy, but a group of Mid-C Columbians likely will tell you it's a smart move for the environment and the economy.

"The neat thing is that the things we're doing now make economic sense," said Tyson Pischel of Green Builder Warehouse in Pasco. "Everybody's looking for ways to save money right now and green saves money."

Pischel is one of many business owners, teachers and other community members who are developing an environmental education plan out of ideas generated during a regional planning meeting in February.

About 150 people from Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties gathered in February at the regional e3 meeting.

E3 is a statewide initiative focused on environment, education and economy as elements of sustainability. It is designed to optimize residents' access to environmental education and resources.

Ginger Wireman, outreach and education specialist for the Department of Ecology's Nuclear Waste Program, leads the regional committee.

She's hoping that as some of the ideas develop into usable resources, they'll start a buzz and get people to "make decisions not just as individuals, but with multiple values in mind.

"People can't make good decisions if they don't know it's an issue," Wireman said.

The focus now is on completing the easiest and quickest ideas, she said.

Helping individuals and businesses reduce their carbon footprint was one main idea that came out of the summit, so Wireman and others are putting together a website containing checklists for making changes.

Some ideas might include how to use less water, cut down on waste or make a home more energy efficient.

A carbon footprint calculator from an area with a climate similar to the Tri-Cities also will be on the site, she said.

Participants at the meeting also wanted easier networking opportunities, so a local directory will be printed, likely this fall, containing a listing of teachers who specialize in environmental and sustainability issues, as well as other people and businesses who could provide their knowledge of sustainability issues, Wireman said.

"It's for people to find out who's doing what in the area," she said.

The directory will be available online and in public places such as libraries.

A statewide directory is available online (eerc.e3washington.org).

Long-term goals are also on the final version of the regional plan draft, including analyzing local codes to make sure they aren't negating sustainable practices, increasing regional participation in recycling, and encouraging and rewarding bus riders.

Aside from ensuring a positive future for the community through helping individuals and businesses network and become more sustainable, educating the next generation is also crucial, Wireman said.

"The decisions that we make about urban planning and development need to consider (long-term consequences)," Wireman said.

Kids also need to learn about the economics of environmental issues in order to evaluate costs and benefits, she said.

The regional plan will be submitted to the state once Wireman integrates any further comments she receives.

Individuals are ultimately the ones who make the difference, Wireman and Pischel said.

"If everybody puts their heads together they can make a lot of things work," Pischel said.

"It's a good thing to do. It's something I think a lot of people are starting to look for information about."