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POLLUTION PREVENTION VIEW

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NEWSLETTER FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Be Prepared with P2

As the seasons come and go in Connecticut, they can bring along different hazards and natural disasters. You may know how to get your lawn ready in the spring but are you also prepared for severe flooding? How about a hurricane in the fall or a winter blizzard? You can be resilient by being prepared while also preventing pollution.

Your personal safety is first and foremost regardless of the hazard, so it's important to stay informed. FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has developed a [new smart phone app](#) that

includes simple steps to prepare for fires, severe weather, and other disasters. There is also a [Connecticut Prepares app](#) that you can download from Connecticut's Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) website. These apps are a convenient way to help protect yourself and your family. While you get ready for what Mother Nature has to offer, here are some other ways you can mitigate the risks of natural hazards to your home, property and our environment.

While April showers bring May flowers, those showers can bring a lot of rainfall. Did you know it takes only six inches of fast-moving water to take a grown adult off their feet, or only a foot of water to carry away a small car? Anywhere it rains it can flood, so be proactive.

To minimize the impact of a flood and any resulting pollution, limit the amount of household hazardous items you have stored at any one time or use less toxic alternatives. Move any paints, stains, oil, cleaning supplies, art materials and other potentially dangerous materials up off of the garage or basement floor to a higher location.

You may want to elevate your furnace and water heater and check that your fuel tank is anchored to the floor. A fuel tank can tip over or float in a flood, causing fuel to spill, so make sure it is secure; vents and fill lines should be visible and above ground. It can be very costly and inconvenient to clean up a house that's had a heating oil spill.

There are [land care features you can install](#) to better manage storm water, such as planting a rain garden, installing a rain barrel, and using pavement and driveway materials that are permeable. These allow rainwater to be absorbed into the ground rather than quickly running off and contributing to flooding and pollution.



Photo Credit: Jane Hawkey, IAN Image Library

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During the heat of summer (and fall), it is important to use as little water as possible. Connecticut had its first ever **drought watch** issued last October and water levels may still be at a deficit. Residents were asked to reduce water use. The state has **useful water conservation information** available on-line, including guidance for private well users.

If necessary to water your lawn, do so early in the morning or in the evening to minimize evaporation. Also use lawn/garden irrigation systems that allow for more effective watering such as drip hoses rather than lawn sprinklers. Installing water-efficient fixtures in kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms, and investing in native garden plants that require less water to grow are good ways to use less water.

Try to save energy by reducing your home power use. Remember to turn off nonessential electronics such as lights, games, computers, and televisions and when possible “**wait til 8pm**” to use major appliances like washers, dryers and dishwashers, when there is less peak electricity demand.

When temperatures drop in winter, the risks for power outages and blizzards rise. More homeowners now have portable generators so they can be more comfortable during these outages, but keep in mind that the exhaust is toxic and polluting. Do not use a generator in your home or in other similar areas, such as a garage or crawlspace, since **carbon monoxide gas** is emitted. Always use them outside and as far as possible from doors, windows and vents to protect your indoor air quality. Close gasoline cans tightly and store them safely. Similarly, never use a gas stove, oven, grill, dryer, or other combustion appliance for heating your home.

The changing of seasons in Connecticut is inevitable but the hazards associated with them do not have to be. Always have a plan and keep your family informed and ready. Be proactive and make changes at home before the emergency strikes. For more preparedness tips, visit www.ready.gov or www.ct.gov/demhs.

Food Waste Becomes Energy in Southington

The State's first anaerobic digester has begun operating and is open for business in Southington, CT. **Quantum Biopower** will take food waste from generators such as banquet halls, schools, grocery stores and food processors and convert it into energy and compost. The food waste, also referred to as organic waste, must be separated from other trash before being sent to Quantum Biopower.



Anaerobic digestion is a process that takes organic waste and “seeds” it with microorganisms to encourage it to decompose. The result is a biogas primarily made up of methane and carbon dioxide that is used as fuel to create energy. Anaerobic digestion is a source of renewable energy. Compost that can be used as a fertilizer is also produced. The new facility is currently in start-up mode and the food waste is being seeded. It takes about 3 months for the biogas generated to reach levels able to create energy. When fully operational, the facility will divert 40,000 tons per year of food waste and generate enough electricity to power 750 homes.

Connecticut passed a **food waste diversion law** that requires certain generators (of more than 2 tons/week) to separate their food waste and send it to a compost facility or digester for recycling. The intent is to spur development of more processing facilities where food scraps can be recycled. It will reduce the amount of food waste currently going to resource recovery plants that burn the waste, and will create jobs, soil amendments and clean energy. Eventually, there will be enough capacity that even the smallest food scrap generators will be able to benefit. Quantum Biopower has constructed the first digester since the food diversion law was adopted. You can find a list of **permitted food scrap recycling facilities** in Connecticut on DEEP's website.

Here Comes the Sun

“I love to watch my electric meter run backwards,” commented one resident on the Solarize website, referring to the excess power generated by his system that flows back into the grid and is credited to his utility bill. “I’ve been reducing my annual electric bill by 90%!” commented another. These residents are among the 2,400 households in Connecticut that have participated in the Solarize CT program over the past 4 years.



Coventry was ranked #1 on CT Municipal Solar Scorecard 2016.

Solarize CT is a program of the nonprofit **SmartPower** and is focused on promoting residential solar installation for **municipalities** and now **faith communities**. Once they sign on to the program, SmartPower works with the community to choose a CT solar installer and together they do an outreach campaign to residents, at no cost to the town. So far, a total of 19,000 kW has been installed.

One benefit of the program is that homeowners receive discounted pricing and financial incentives to go solar. These benefits are offered for a limited time period. “The deadline encourages people to decide within the timeframe of the program and overcomes the inclination of people to put off major decision-making,” said Kate Donnelly, Solarize Outreach Manger. Also, having a single installer selected by the community reduces the overwhelming task of picking a good contractor from the list of nearly 100 in the state. The town’s vetting of installers helps homeowners feel comfortable taking the leap to go solar. SmartPower and the chosen installer work with the town to educate homeowners about how solar works and the financing available to them. Installers offer free site visits to residents to see if their home is good for solar. SmartPower provides materials like yard signs and banners, as well as assistance in holding workshops and doing social media pushes. Participation in the municipal program can fulfill 25% of a town’s commitment as a **Clean Energy Community**.

The Town of Durham sponsored one of the first Solarize campaigns in 2012. First Selectwoman Laura Francis credits the town’s “solar ambassadors,” the Clean Energy and Sustainability Task Force as well as the **Coginchaug Area Transition (CAT)** group, for the town’s tremendous success at getting 120 solar installations, in a town of only 7300 residents. “Solarize not only increased solar installations, it also built community and was a catalyst for the town to make continued investments in energy efficiency for municipal buildings and get solar panels on the firehouse,” said Francis.

North Haven, with a population of 24,000, has also been successful with Solarize. The Town was recognized by Energize CT for its energy saving accomplishments including 20 contracts signed and 195 kW of solar installed in their 2016 Solarize campaign. Kenny Foscue, chair of the town’s clean energy task force reports, “Part of our campaign involved high school students who used Google Earth to help the contractor identify town residences with good solar exposure. Follow-up letters were then sent to 700 residences encouraging them to sign up for a site visit.” North Haven is now able to offer free utility home energy audits to about 300 residences as a result of a **Clean Energy Communities grant to the town**.

You may still be able to take advantage of the Solarize program even if your town doesn’t currently have a campaign. Just go to the **Solarize** website to indicate your interest, or get your **faith community** to sign on.

Get Connected with DEEP’s Newsletter

Your Environmental Connection has news and information to help businesses and municipalities comply with environmental laws and regulations and to ultimately guide them towards more sustainable practices. Information on what’s happening at the DEEP along with current grant and funding opportunities is also included in this quarterly electronic newsletter. To view past issues and to subscribe, visit www.ct.gov/deep/publications.

Ask Eartha



I heard that coffee production is bad for the environment. Is there some way I can still enjoy my coffee in the morning without the guilt?

Debbie S., Abington, CT

Several food items have become very popular and consumer demand for them has resulted in ecological impacts. Coffee is one such item; almonds, avocados, and palm oil are other examples. We should be mindful of our over-consumption of foods, especially those not grown locally. Fortunately, there are ways to grow some of the food crops we eat or drink with less impact on the environment. Sometimes it means we need to look back at the way they were first grown.

Coffee plants were historically grown under tropical forest canopies, where they naturally were found. It wasn't until the demand greatly increased that coffee began to be grown in direct sunlight and as a monoculture. While this practice produces a higher yield and greater profits for the companies, it is detrimental to the local ecosystem. Forests are cleared, destroying wildlife habitat and causing soil erosion. Without natural fertilization from plant and animal biodiversity of the rainforest, chemical fertilizers must be used, which can also contribute to water pollution.

While you don't have to give up your morning coffee, you can limit how much you drink and make some changes in what you buy. You can purchase **Rainforest Alliance Certified™ coffee**, which is grown following sustainable farming practices, including being "shade



grown." When you buy this type of coffee, you are supporting farms that help protect the natural environment.

In addition to purchasing shade-grown coffee, here are a few other food choices you can make that will help make a difference.

Choose Locally Grown. Supporting local farmers helps protect land in your community and saves energy by cutting down on transportation of foods from far-away places.

Buy Organic. By purchasing organically grown foods, you are supporting production methods that don't depend on synthetic fertilizers or pesticides.

Waste not, Want Not. Take care in not buying or cooking more food than you can use — 40 percent of food in the U.S. goes uneaten, which means that all the resources used in producing the food is wasted. If you do end up with food you can't use, compost it instead of throwing it in the trash.

Look for Less Packaging. Packaging has an environmental impact too. Look for ways to cut down, such as bringing your own containers to stores that sell in bulk and carrying a reusable bottle instead of buying water in plastic bottles.

Eartha answers selected environmental questions. Email your question to connie.mendolia@ct.gov and watch future issues for your answer.

Improve your indoor environment with plants. They help filter pollutants out of the air and add humidity, making your workplace or home more comfortable.



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