



Green expert to speak in Bellingham on building, living environmentally friendly

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JARED PABEN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - What does it matter if your apartment is powered by solar, or if jump into your gas-guzzling SUV to drive to the corner store, where you buy processed food?

Then again, you can live as environmentally friendly as you want, but the U.S. government and its military will still generate more carbon emissions than other countries, including Canada.

We need to build, live and vote green, says Greg Searle, an expert in green living who will speak at two events in Bellingham this week. The first, on Thursday, Sept. 3, is a free public lecture entitled "Green buildings are not enough." Then, he'll speak at a major green-building and living conference Friday, Sept. 4, an event put on by nonprofit Sustainable Connections and sponsored by local governments and companies.

Searle, executive director of Ottawa-based RioRegional North America, leads the North American section of what's called the One Planet Communities program. The program creates plans for developers to help them dramatically reduce the environmental impacts of their projects and people living in them.

The relative success of encouraging green development has distracted from the fact that building is only about one-third of the issue, he said. Another third is people not living in an environmentally friendly way.

"The problem is in America, we've made it inconvenient to live sustainably," he said in an interview. "It's easy to do drive-thru banking and shopping and get industrial packaged food."

"There are people out there living sustainably, but it's like a career," he added. "It takes all of their energy and thinking ... to make it happen. That needs to change."

The last third, which is not often talked about, is the large carbon footprint of U.S. government programs, Searle said. By comparison, Canada and many European countries have smaller militaries and bureaucracies and spend less on infrastructure.

"In a sense, we all have our personal share, through our taxes, of the government's carbon footprint," he said.

A lot can be done on a personal level: driving a fuel-efficient vehicle, eating less meat and dairy or becoming a vegan, buying local and organic food, and composting food and other waste.

Developers can do more, too: consider not just energy-efficient buildings (which often still rely on nongreen power, like coal), but consider solar and wind power. Even in the Pacific Northwest, which utilizes river dams to generate clean electricity, Puget Sound Energy still has about 36 percent of its electricity come from coal, according to PSE. Electricity from biomass, landfill gas, petroleum, waste and wind together only generate about 2 percent. Solar wasn't even given its own category.

Developers also can consider burning scrap wood to heat developments, because new chimney filters make the emissions cleaner, and the scrap wood otherwise would be thrown away and release carbon, Searle said.

"It's far better to use it productively to replace fossil fuels which are not part of the current cycle," he said.

Developers also can lay out projects to encourage mass transit and car sharing, and they can bring a farmers market on site or provide space for community gardens. The projects he works on even have leasing guidelines requiring grocery stores to have a certain percentage of local food, he said.

One project he's worked on, the \$1 billion Sonoma Mountain Village north of San Francisco, has been lauded for its light environmental impact. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger praised it. With about 1,900 homes on a former industrial site, the waiting list for a home is already larger than that and the project is not even finished. A solar array powering 1,000 homes has been installed, and the ratio of jobs to residents will be 1:1, according to One Planet Communities' Web site.

"It seems like a lot of folks want to live like this," he said.

FREE LECTURE

What: Greg Searle, an expert in sustainable living, will give a lecture entitled "Green buildings are not enough."

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 3

Where: Bellingham Cruise Terminal, 355 Harris Ave. in Fairhaven.

ATTEND GREEN CONFERENCE

Sustainable Connections will hold the Smart Growth for Sustainable Communities Conference, which will feature five speakers throughout Friday morning. Highlights:

7:45 a.m.: Registration opens.

8:15 a.m.: Welcome.

8:30 a.m.: Greg Searle, "The Other Half of the Challenge."

10:15 a.m.: Mark Hinshaw, "True Urbanism," followed by Roger Valdez, "Sightline Scores Smart Growth."

11:45 a.m.: Don Vehige and Sean Canady, "Density Done Right."

12:45 p.m.: Interactive workshop "UrbanPlan SLAM" where participants develop an idea and pitch it.

Where: Bellingham Cruise Terminal in Fairhaven, 355 Harris Ave.

Cost: member of Sustainable Connections \$59, general public \$69, \$10 more day of conference.

Register, more info: SustainableConnections.org.

SEE A GREEN HOUSE

What: Aiki Homes is offering a free tour of a Fairhaven home under construction that aims for high environmentally friendly construction standards. It's shooting for a platinum certification under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards. Features include rainwater indoor plumbing and recycling building materials.

When: 10 to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 5.

Where: 17th Street and Mill Avenue.

More information: Contact Casey Curtis at 927-5121 or Casey@aikihomes.com

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