

How to become a radical environmentalist in 5 easy steps

By Zeke Wright | Mercury | Posted: Tuesday, April 21, 2015 5:00 pm

Big green radicals – they’re all around us. They want to eliminate cheap energy sources, reduce our options when food-shopping at the local grocery, and end mining and domestic energy exploration. The funding for this dystopic verdant future? Straight from the Kremlin.

OK, so that’s if you listen to the Environmental Policy Alliance, a thinly veiled front group by the lobbying and consulting firm Berman and Company, a shill for corporate and special interests. The deceptive practices of Richard Berman’s industry-funded campaigns against labor unions, public health advocates, and consumer, safety, and environmental groups earned him the moniker “Dr. Evil” in one “60 Minutes” segment. Sadly, public and media alike buy into the message, allowing the PR group to influence opinions via “experts” on op-ed pages and in news articles.

In celebration of Berman and Co.’s latest creation, www.biggreenradicals.com, we want to spread the word about out-of-control Earth-loving fanatics this Earth Day. Buckle up — to a tree — and read on because simply changing your lightbulbs to CFLs isn’t going to fly if you, too, want to become an environmental radical.

1 Ditch your car, ride a bike.

Certainly, some people enjoy traveling head and shoulders above everyone else on the road, and that’s why they’re the sole passenger in their three-ton Hummer H2. Yes, in an accident, you would escape unscathed in your military-cum-suburban transport. But just so you’re aware, this writer is actively heaping contempt at the door sills of your 9 mpg behemoth, and that is why I’m not letting you merge.

Mark Chesterton, Bike Newport’s director of youth programs, spends much of his time encouraging children to bicycle more. There are weeks when Chesterton logs more miles on a bike than his car, and he’s no fair-weather cyclist.

“When I can, I try to do grocery shopping,” he says, and the plan with his daughter entering



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kindergarten is to get her to school by bike. “I’m not car-free by any means, but the idea of ‘car light’ appeals to me.”

“Given the chance, I will pick my bike to get to work,” he continues. When it’s cold, “we just have to put on a few extra layers.”

For those interested in adding more bicycling to their routine, Chesterton recommends picking out a route beforehand, and allowing enough time to comfortably arrive at your destination.

And Chesterton stresses: The Lycra is optional.

2 Divest from fossil fuels.

It’s nigh indisputable: Anyone who contests anthropogenic climate change is either ill-informed or on the dole of the fossil fuel industry. “Divest from fossil fuels? Not if you like your life,” the friendly folks at www.biggreenradicals.com threaten. It’s not really about liking my life or not, Berman; it’s about whether or not I want the 1995 film “Waterworld” to be fully realized. I don’t think even Kevin Costner wants a part in that.

Taking their cue from Bill McKibben of www.350.org, the fossil fuel divestment movement has grown to over 400 colleges and universities and many more towns and cities across the country. Locally, Fossil Free Rhode Island targeted the investment portfolios of institutions of higher education as part of a divestment strategy.

The University of Rhode Island Foundation, which manages a \$110 million endowment portfolio, passed on the request last year to divest from related fossil fuel investments. Fortunately, the URI Foundation building is located on the Kingston campus and not the Narragansett Bay Campus, which will become more bay and less campus as sea levels rise according to projections (www.climatecentral.org).

Peter Nightingale, a physics professor at URI and member of Fossil Free RI, certainly may be one of those green radicals Berman warns us about. Nightingale was arrested last December for civil disobedience during a sit-in at Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse’s office in Providence. The action was part of a week of national resistance.

“We entered the office earlier that afternoon, and announced that some of us would be arrested. Six o’clock rolled around and they wanted to go to dinner,” Nightingale recalls. A \$300 fine and four months later, Nightingale is unrepentant. “We have to change the way we run our economy,” he says.

“Our message was the same in all cases, namely, we can’t keep investing in fossil fuel infrastructure when we need to reduce global greenhouses emissions by 7 percent to avoid environmental catastrophe.”

While the URI Foundation didn’t bite, a multi-school divestment fund does exist for donors who want

strings attached to their contributions. To put pressure on universities, the fund (www.divestfund.org) works as an escrow account: Make a donation to the school of your choice and the funds are then dispersed when and if the institution divests. Fossil Fuel RI is considering the fund as a strategy.

3 Recycle. Everything.

Newport resident Pamela Gilpin is known to have a green thumb. A landscape gardener and board member of the Newport Tree Society, Gilpin is always eager to lend a hand in the garden, even offering to plant trees in neighbors' yards. She also recycles. Everything, except for that dreadful Styrofoam.

"I recycle everything that comes in the house," she says. With Rhode Island's statewide single-stream recycling, it's easier than ever to recycle — and cheaper, considering recycling is free while trash disposal will cost you. So it boggles the mind that many in the Ocean State don't bother.

"It's just my everyday normal routine: Not to waste," Gilpin says. "I compost all of the kitchen waste. Every scrap of paper gets recycled. Quick showers. ... It's just dull, normal stuff."

Why can't more people be like Gilpin, a self-described "cuckoo recycler"? "I stop and think about every single thing before I throw it away. Is it something somebody can use?" she says.

"I hound people. I'm a little bit of a nag."

4 Stick a wind turbine through your roof.

Newport resident John McNulty had homemade wind turbines on his roof till he ran afoul of city officials. "It wasn't an issue until some politicians made it an issue," he says.

A replacement turbine, awaiting to be installed through a section of his home to avoid further entanglement with the Zoning Board ("I simply said bam, I'll put it right through my house. So I caught them with their pants down, twice, and I'm proud of that"), will be up sometime this spring. McNulty first became interested in wind power as a sailor and as a general contractor working on local windmill restoration projects.

With the new turbine and a slate of solar panels, McNulty expects to be producing all his own power. "I'm going to have power when the sun is shining, and when the wind is blowing and the turbine is turning I'm going to have power," — and he'll be storing power for still, cloudy days, too.

Asked whether he's a green radical, McNulty replies: "I'm a green eccentric."

5 Stop breeding. Just stop.

Much of today and tomorrow's environmental woes can be chalked up to one simple fact: There are too many damn people on the planet. In the 1960s, an organization for population stabilization, "Zero Population Growth," formed to make the case that current trends were unsustainable.

The world population today exceeds 7 billion, with most reliable predictions showing a curve that levels out at about 11 billion around 2050. Considering the amount of environmental degradation wrought over the past 50 years, woe to anyone expecting to see the next 50.

Solving the twin concerns of overpopulation and producing children who will likely wind up in Mad Maxesque thunderdomes, the motto of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement is simple: “May we live long and die out.”

Phasing out the human race by voluntarily ceasing to breed will allow Earth’s biosphere to return to good health, according to movement founder Les U. Knight.

“Each new U.S. resident not created preserves 20 acres of potential wildlife habitat for 78 years. That’s our ecological footprint: what it takes to support our existence,” says Knight via email. “It’s not all in one place, of course. There’s a little piece of Africa in my cell phone.”

“People who want to reduce their impact might change their diet and their transportation, but not adding another of us to the billions is by far the single greatest action we can take to benefit Earth’s biosphere,” according to Knight.

Update April 23: Fossil Free RI announced University of Rhode Island has become a member of the Multi-School Fossil Free Divestment Fund. This fund provides a mechanism to hold donations to the University until such time as divestment occurs. For more information: www.divestfund.org.