

OTHER ROOMS

A power switch and paper trims

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Now for the rest of the house.

I deserve a big fat "F" in my home office, mostly because I print out almost everything I need to read so that I can underline important passages or carry the papers around.

That makes me a big consumer of petroleum-derived inks and a big paper waster too, even though I often print on the back of pages I'm done with.

That will stop. I promise.

I also waste power, which in California usually translates into wasting natural gas.

As suggested by nearly everyone who writes about this stuff, I'll reorganize the hordes of plugs -- the ones for the computer, all-in-one printer, cable modem, wireless LAN router and the mini television turned to CNBC -- onto one or two power strips. That way, I can turn them off in bunches at the end of the day.

On the plus side, my computer monitor is an energy-saving flat-panel LCD, my wireless mouse is outfitted with rechargeable batteries and my fancy Herman Miller Mirra office chair is certified as complying with the [Cradle-to-Cradle Design Protocol](#) developed by William McDonough and Michael Braungart.

The concept -- sometimes shortened to just C2C -- requires companies to use the least harmful chemicals and materials in their products and design them so they can be disassembled and recycled into something else.

My chair was made from 42% recycled materials, and as much as 96% of its components are recyclable. It contains no polyvinyl chloride, also known as PVC, and the molded polymer back can be recycled as many as 25 times, according to a two-page Mirra chair fact sheet. Wow.

When I paid \$700 for it in 2004, I thought it was just another expensive but crucially comfortable office chair. I had a feeling my Mirra chair was special when I saw one at the desk of actor and environmentalist Ed Begley Jr., author of "Living Like Ed: A Guide to the Eco-Friendly Life."

Now I know to look for products with C2C certification.

As Begley likes to say: "If you're not buying recycled, you're not recycling."

Carpet is pervasive in our house, and when we replaced it last year, we bought a nylon-fiber type made by Royalty Carpet Mills Inc. The mill uses 90% reclaimed water and is based in Irvine, so I awarded myself mini-points for saving water and reducing the fuel needed to deliver the rolls. But from a petro-addiction standpoint, it was a big gulp from the barrel because our selection didn't contain any recycled material.

We have an [Energy Star](#) clothes washer. (The federal government's rating program doesn't test dryers, and unfortunately, ours doesn't have an energy-saving moisture sensor.) The majority of our light fixtures sport energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs.

Our fireplace came with a natural gas line, but last winter we used Duraflame logs instead -- the kind that

gives off less bad stuff than wood and includes "all natural ingredients. No petro-chemicals."

I'm ashamed to say that in our living room we have a 42-inch plasma flat-screen TV -- a monster energy waster. Oops. But my husband and I are sports fiends and that's a luxury we aren't likely to give up.

An LCD screen uses much less energy, but I'm not springing for one now. After all, I'm a journalist and not made of money.

Overall, though, we're not as bad off as I thought. There are several things we can do now to further reduce my oil jones. We'll ponder the big stuff too.

I figure the most important concept is in my head for good: Buy less and use less. If we do that well enough, we could switch to a 35-gallon trash container from our 95-gallon beast -- that would save us more than \$6 a month in trash collection fees.