

## A breath of fresh air – don't take it for granted

**By Samantha Goff**

*Tribune Sentinel Staff*

There is nothing more fundamental to human health than breathing. If you have been indoors too long, or in a stinky room too long, there is nothing better than a “breath of fresh air.” You can make no doubts about the “ahhhhh” feeling you get when you are breathing fresh, clean, crisp air.

It is actually something we really take for granted, after all, is it not our right to breathe clean air that will not harm us?

The air we are breathing right now is a little bit cleaner than it would have been without the Clean Air Act that has been in effect since 1970.

It is estimated that between 1970 and 1990, this act alone is responsible for preventing 205,000 premature deaths, 21,000 cases of heart disease, and 843,000 asthma attacks.

Since 1980, the Clean Air Act has reduced lead levels in the air by 92 percent, which is significantly reducing the number of children with impaired intelligence. It is also responsible for creating an estimated 1.3 million jobs between 1977 and 1991 in environmental and pollution control technologies.

The air we breathe is cleaner, but it could get better. There are lots of ways we can help keep our air fresh and clean:

- Walk or ride a bike. Vehicles emit Co2 pollution, which is more gas in the atmosphere, and greenhouse gases are part of what causes global warming—not to mention, the physical damage.
- Shop locally. Not only are you supporting your local economy, but many goods and foods are shipped in coal burning trains and diesel burning 18 wheelers. One semi-truck traveling for a day can emit as much pollution as 150 cars making the same trip.
- Turn off your appliances when they aren't being used. This reduces the emissions made from the electric company.
- Recycle any and all materials you can—that helps conserve energy and production emissions.
- Plant trees. Trees play such an important role in our earth's carbon cycle. They absorb carbon dioxide during their photosynthesis process and the end result is the production of oxygen.

Forests in the United States absorb and store 750 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, which is equal to about 10 percent of the country's carbon dioxide emissions.

Strategically planting trees in your own yard can also help shade your house in the summer months, preventing the use of more energy trying to cool it down.

- Drive smart. If you have to drive, it's easy to plan your trip to save gas which reduces pollution and saves miles. Car pool. One is better than two when it comes to cars on the road!

Keep your vehicle well maintained by checking your spark plugs, tire pressure, and alignment,

to help reduce its impact on the air. If you are in the market for a new vehicle, consider a hybrid.

I cannot imagine a world where there is no fresh air. Can you? We only have one Earth, and we are ruining her. I truly believe that if we don't make some changes, future generations will never even know what a "breath of fresh air" really is.