

Live Sustainably Now: A Low-Carbon Vision of the Good Life

Karl Coplan

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Karl Coplan's *Live Sustainably Now* suggests ways to reduce one's carbon footprint with a "carbon budget" that may seem like a severe challenge, but whose strategies set a realistic example.

For the past decade, Coplan has restricted himself to four tons of carbon a year—40% of the average American's annual emissions. He achieves this by commuting by kayak, taking trains to conferences, traveling overseas via sailboat, and installing solar panels at his cabin, among other things. Although such measures have limited results without wider policy changes, Coplan stresses that all have a moral duty to minimize their impact.

Incisive comparisons are made to other social revolutions that required laypeople's action, including abolition, temperance, and the civil rights movement. The book argues that cultural shifts often precede legislative change. This line of thinking heads off attempts to place the blame on governments alone and shirk personal responsibility.

Anticipating an audience of "committed environmentalists," the book assumes familiarity with the basic science behind climate change. It includes just a quick recap and the definitions of the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change's terms. Still, even green veterans may find some of these ideas—a composting toilet; a fossil fuel-free Earth Week in April—beyond the pale.

The book does not advocate joyless self-denial. In fact, it contends that a decision to "sweat the big stuff" by selecting sustainable electricity, heating, transportation, and food options leaves latitude for indulgences. The intention is to reduce one's impact "while still living well." Coplan's month-by-month, photo-illustrated carbon diaries attest that he is neither a hermit nor a masochist: "We all deserve our occasional feast day."

Live Sustainably Now is a personal, practical guide to low-carbon living.

REBECCA FOSTER (January / February 2020)

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