

Don't be green when it comes to the environment Change is the individual's responsibility

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If supporting the environment--at the expense of corporations and consumers alike--doesn't strike you as a significant priority by now, you're not paying attention.

At an international, local and individual level, stories of our planet's demise surround us. At each of those intervals, however, everyone simply passes the buck on environmental issues. And while many people are quick to stress they strive for efficiency in their own personal pursuits, "doing your part" just won't cut it anymore. The world is asking for more.

Around the nation, some major players are starting to take notice of the situation, but they aren't quite motivated enough to do much more than schedule some meetings about the subject.

According to an article in Monday's The Salt Lake Tribune ("Mayors come to Utah for warming summit"), local mayors from more than 30 cities across the nation gathered together at the Second Annual Sundance Summit to discuss potential ways to reduce the use of fossil fuels. Among the most prominent of the attendees were Madeline Albright, Gary Hart, Rocky Anderson and host Robert Redford.

Salt Lake City's representatives likely held their heads high as one of the 300 national cities that has agreed to uphold the Kyoto Protocol, having reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 21 percent in the last five years. Rocky Anderson even replaced City Hall's light bulbs with "energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs." Still, many of the conference's attendees will simply have come for some mountain scenery and good press at the price of a plane ticket.

The New York Times included a revealing feature last Saturday ("The Paradoxes of Businesses as Do-Gooders,") by Joe Nocera on the recent Businesses for Social Responsibility conference in New York City. The conference is a part of a movement dubbed "corporate social responsibility" that has emerged largely in response to a change in consumer--or "stakeholder"--expectations. Environmental advocate Paul Hawken said, "Corporate social responsibility is a very safe place to talk about (social responsibility). By safe, I mean it doesn't challenge the business model." The point is, according to Nocera, that Ford might change its light bulbs, but it's not going to let anybody ask it to stop building gas-guzzling SUVs.

For that to happen, change has to come from a grassroots level. That means you.

The one current and three former U students who created the Sustainable Environments and Ecological Design group, which intends to lobby ASUU into passing a resolution to work toward making the U a "sustainable campus," are shining examples of the commitment necessary to enact progress.

"Approximately 70 percent" of the U's current waste output isn't recycled, a problem that SEED hopes to resolve partially by putting recycling bins in every classroom. It also hopes to mandate eco-friendly textbooks, the installation of solar panels, organic gardens and reduction in water use.

We have to rely on the efforts of groups like SEED, because the bottom-line friendly initiatives of corporations and nations often fall short of what's necessary to keep our world from becoming an inhabitable wasteland.

The U already has done some commendable things, like the implementation of a paper-free campus, xeriscaping and building eco-safe buildings. It's important for us to keep pressuring the university, and the other institutions in our lives, to consider Planet Earth.