

## Rubbish-free year: Week 30

4:00 AM Monday Sep 1, 2008

While talking to a friend yesterday, I was again struck by how difficult it is to always "do the right thing". The problem is that the "right thing" in one area may well be a grievous sin in another.

For example, she has always tried to buy eco-friendly dishwashing detergent, but she recently learned that Sumatran tigers in Indonesia are under threat because the palm trees that make up their habitat are being milled for palm oil, a key ingredient in environmentally friendly detergents.

Previously, it was this type of thing that contributed to our apathy about doing anything, since it added to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the enormity of trying to step lightly in the world.

I don't think there would be a quick conclusion to a discussion that tried to decide if it was better to save the tigers or to protect our waterways and, as cheesy as the saying is, it can appear that ignorance is indeed bliss. One of the things I have found this year is that generally people are extremely gracious in providing education when by trying to do the right thing in one area our actions are causing a negative consequence in another.

Rather than becoming overwhelmed, we try to remind ourselves that it is important to start somewhere, and that along the way we can add to this base in considering other aspects of our lifestyle and consumption. I don't think it is possible to get it right 100 per cent of the time, but my ignorance is not bliss for the various environments that my lifestyle may negatively impact on, and doesn't change the reality of the situation.

So this year there have been some unexpected changes as well as being rubbish-free, including avoiding buying tuna, the purchase of a more expensive front-loader washing machine instead of a top loader, and improved efforts to buy organic cotton clothing where possible. But sainthood is still a long way off and the debate continues over whether we should own a car (we do, in fact, have two) and the ethics of air travel.

At the start of the year we bought a 10-litre recyclable container of dishwashing liquid and a 20-litre recyclable container of clothes' washing liquid from B-E-E. We have found both to be really good and have used only about two litres of the clothes' liquid. Yes, we do wash our clothes, but the front loader doesn't want much liquid because it froths up so much. When these containers are used up we might fill them up at the Bin Inn, or we may have converted to soap nuts.

According to [Wikipedia](#) soap nuts grow on trees in warm temperate to tropical areas. They contain a natural detergent and apparently if we place four to six in a small cotton bag they create frothy soapy water and clean the clothes well. We plan to try them this week and will let you know how we found them.

*Photo: Russell Smith*

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The comment about the front loader washing machine being more expensive to purchase prompted me to write that actually ever stopped to work it out, but its often no cheaper or environmentally friendlier to buy plain wrapper or eco friendly products. In fact one tends to pay a premium?.

Call me a negative sod, but I believe the "save the planet" marketing capitalises on peoples concerns and then profiteers from the fact that they put less in to the product and charge you more for it, the dumb thing is we seem happy with that.?