

Charging Up For Electric Cars

Hawaii is about to launch an electric car experiment that could change the island's need for fuel and make gas stations a thing of the past. The state has entered into a partnership with Better Place LLC, a California company with the goal of reducing our country's addiction to petroleum through a network of auto charging stations.

Better Place, which has agreements with automaker Nissan, will install thousands of stations throughout Hawaii in 2009, laying the groundwork for large-scale electric car use by 2012. Hawaii's access to renewable energy resources like solar and wind makes it an ideal location to serve as a blueprint for reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil. Better Place will also swap old car batteries for fresh ones, and subscribers will pay a predetermined fee.

Building Program Helps Green Out Poverty

New low-income housing developments in the U.S. can be cleaner and healthier, with less impact on the environment, thanks to organizations such as the Enterprise Green Communities Offset FundT.

The Fund, a national nonprofit organization, raises funds and gives contributions to enable local, community-based groups to create low-income housing that is more energy efficient, takes advantage of renewable energy sources, and reduces the amount of carbon dioxide and other contaminants released into the atmosphere.

"Along with all the good they do, we financially help this organization's activities because fully 100 percent of all of our contributions go to support environmental and sustainable projects," says Klaus Reichardt, founder and managing partner of Waterless Co., LLC, manufacturers of waterless urinal systems and other restroom fixtures.

The Enterprise program selects developers that are already planning to build green, affordable housing for low-income people, then works with the developer to find ways to make the project even greener and further reduce carbon emissions. The developer adopts the measures suggested by Enterprise and the Enterprise Fund pays the developer to incorporate the added green initiatives. Once completed, Enterprise certifies the project annually for 10 years, ensuring that the emission reductions program is working.

"They are 'Greening out poverty' one house at a time, helping low-income families experience the benefits of a greener living environment," adds Reichardt. "This is proving to be a very unique and successful program."

Website:
www.greencommunitiesonline.org/green/offset

Preheatable Stones Keep Dinner Warm

One of the realities in the culinary world is that even expertly cooked food tends to cool off — often much sooner than one would like. While there are a variety of electric plate warmers on the market to try to keep things warm, a new innovation from Iowa-based Roccia Bollente Dining Stones uses natural granite to keep meals steamy until the last bite.

Each Dining Stone set includes a precision-cut granite stone disc — available in a variety of colors — and a custom-fitted wooden tray to hold it in cherry, alder or ash. The stones take just 15 minutes to heat in a 350-degree oven; once they're hot, they are simply placed under dinner plates to keep food warm. Even after 45 minutes, their surface temperature is still 220 degrees.

While the primary motivation behind their creation was keeping hot food warm, the stones are equally useful for keeping

Now, there's a great idea!

chilled foods cold — an hour in the freezer makes them cold enough to keep salads crisp and drinks icy, the company says. A 9-inch set was designed to warm dinner plates, while a smaller, 6-inch version was designed with chilled salad plates in mind, but consumers can use each for either purpose. Pricing begins at \$40 for the smaller set, and \$60 for the larger version.

Launched this fall, Roccia Bollente plans to sell its Dining Stones to restaurants, caterers, wholesalers, kitchen stores and gift shops. Want to get in on this one early....? Website: www.diningstones.com

Reusable Lunch Box Napkins

The waste associated with kids school lunches is pretty awful. Zeroing in on paper napkins — \$200 of which the average kid uses each year — North Carolina-based Happikins recently launched an eye-pleasing line of reusable lunch box napkins.

Available in packages of five, Happikins are 12-by-12-inch cotton or cotton-blend napkins featuring kid-friendly colors and designs. Each set comes with a durable pouch that fits neatly in a lunch box and can even be written on with a dry-erase marker to send little messages to the kids who use them. Both the napkins and the pouch are machine-washable, and Happikins can even be monogrammed. Sets include designs on the themes of "Critters and Creatures," "League of Sports" and "Sugar and Spice." Pricing begins at \$29.95 per set of five. Bulk orders for "Clean Cafeteria" and fundraising programs are also available.

And so another bit of waste bites the dust, thanks to some green innovation. Coming soon to a lunch box near you! ;-) For more information visit online: www.happikins.com.

Fungus and Rice Hulls Instead of Styrofoam for Insulation

Polystyrene products have been used for years as home insulation and Styrofoam packaging, but the petroleum-based materials are infamous for the toll they take on the environment. Ecovative, a Troy, N.Y., start-up, aims to replace such products with an organic alternative derived from fungus and agricultural waste.

Rather than being manufactured from preexisting ingredients -- a process that inevitably takes considerable energy --

Ecovative's Greensulate is actually grown fresh from a mixture including water, recycled paper and rice hulls (a form of agricultural waste). The mixture is injected with living mushroom cells inside a mold and then placed in a dark environment where the cells begin to grow and sprout thousands of cellular strands. In one to two weeks, the result is ready to be dried into a panel of insulation that can be used to keep a house warm in winter and cool in summer, or to protect a package during shipment.

Greensulate is fire retardant, and it's also unlikely to trigger mold and fungus allergies, by virtue of the drying process. And while its polystyrene counterparts take up landfill space indefinitely, Greensulate is highly compostable, enriching the soil surrounding it and even aiding the breakdown of other nearby waste.

Current cost projections suggest Greensulate will retail at costs competitive with traditional foams, the company says.

A commercially available insulation product is targeted for mid-2009. The company is actively seeking strategic partners to aid in Greensulate's commercialization.

Website: www.ecovative.com

Seattle Airport Offers Electricity for Plug-in Cars

As if tax breaks, freedom from the pump and an emissions-free conscience weren't enough to make a person want to drive an electric car, the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is now doing its part to make the road even smoother for the plug-in vehicles by offering free charging in select parking spots in the airport garage.

Through a recently launched pilot program, the Sea-Tac Airport now offers six parking spaces in a prime location of the garage with plug-ins for electric vehicles. The green-striped spots, located on the garage's fifth floor, are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Standard parking rates apply, but the electricity itself is free.

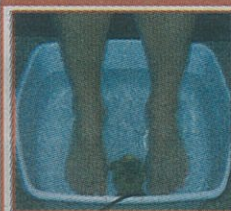
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