

## Deeper Shade of Green

By Holly Barbo

# How Does Our Carbon Footprint Impact Our Bottom Line?

**W**hen I got back from the Las Vegas trade show I felt like a Hybrid car with an empty tank and a nearly dead battery. (Whatever possessed me to think I could get everything done and see everything in less than three days?) But the experience got me thinking about energy, fuel and how we as retailers are in for some interesting changes that we need to adapt to.

Carbon footprint is the base of the "Green Triangle." The trick in making any part of the green movement meaningful to you, as a retailer, is the same mental process our customers are going through. We need to apply the idea to our businesses in individual ways. It is more than the furniture industry's carbon footprint. It is the economic impact of that carbon footprint on our industry and livelihood.

In 1964, our country found 48 billion barrels of oil and consumed about 12 billion. The ratio was even in 1988, when we found 23 billion barrels and used 23 billion barrels. If that isn't interesting enough, here is one more. In 2005 we found a little over 5 billion barrels and used 30 billion barrels. Now into this worrisome energy mix stir in the fact that China, India and Vietnam are in stages of industrialization. Their energy and oil needs are climbing astronomically and will continue to do so. It is estimated that within a year there will

be 80 million cars in China. Indonesia and Vietnam are competing with us for the same energy. This is just not sustainable. There isn't enough to go around. As the demand increases, the prices will go up. Not only will the cost of the oil increase, but because of the energy costs in the factories and in transportation, there will be higher prices for the goods they build and sell to us.

Putting aside that cheery picture, let's look at what is developing in our country. For every 1 cent the price of gas goes up, 1 billion dollars leaves the economy. Our consumers are having more demands put upon their budget. Things are financially tighter. Choices have to be made about what purchases to make. When the prices of goods from China increase, that will cause our prices to go up also. This will make our bargain lines less of a bargain.

### What to Do?

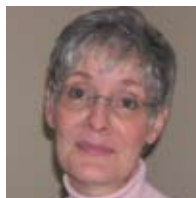
Now let's tighten the focus one more time. What can we do? We can do as many small things as possible. To start, we could encourage our employees to carpool, tune up our delivery trucks, use diesel or bio-diesel fuel and synchronize our delivery trips to minimize extra driving around. Inside our stores, we can have weather stripping on our doors, change all of our lighting to fluo-

rescent energy saver bulbs, clean our filters and perhaps put ceiling fans in all of our higher ceiling areas like our warehouses. Sometimes an energy savings opportunity happens in unexpected ways. Last winter, during a cold spell, our store's furnace gave its last gasping breath. Since we had to replace it, we went ahead and put in a much more efficient heating system. All of these ideas are small, but I'll bet if every single retail store did this (and we did it in our own homes, as well) the accumulative energy

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savings would definitely be measurable. Can you or your employees think of any other suggestions?

Are all of these things the right thing to do? You bet! But there is no reason that "Green" can't also be "Gr\$\$n." There are benefits on all of these green energy savings actions. They help out our customers because these efforts save us money and we can pass the savings on to them. It also helps reduce our carbon footprint. So when we are chatting with our customers about the virtues of our furniture and services, we will also know that we are walking that green walk with them. **HFB**



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