

If You're Green You Are Going to HELL!

How do we know that working toward a sustainable, so-called “green” future is a good thing? I’d like to challenge the idea that “being green” is good. Maybe, “being green” is the fastest way to Hell?

I first explored this idea of a green hell during a talk to a University of Illinois group named “Students for Environmental Concerns” (SECS, yes, it would be pronounced “sex”, but the members prefer to say “S-E-C-S”), a campus organization with a long history of moving and prodding a sluggish university administration into things that are good for our campus. After hearing some nervous giggles in the crowd at the conclusion of my story, the story seemed worth repeating.

The basic premise is that we humans really don’t understand much at all. How did the Golgi apparatus evolve? How does the sun maintain a “stable” reactive state rather than simply blowing up in an instant? Deb hates when I tell elementary classes that the sun could blow up at any second. And, should you choose paper or plastic? If we can’t figure these things out, how can we possibly know what the Creator really has in mind for us? I’m a PK (Preacher’s kid), so while I don’t have any more insight into these things than you, I do have an inside track to tell you anyone who professes to know the answers, doesn’t.



This story relates to beer and brewing beer. My son, Ben, and I have an engineering research and development company named Newell Instruments, located in Urbana, Illinois. Build Equinox is a division of our company. Our laboratory is a bit different from how most people would envision an engineering laboratory. In addition to our test chambers, computers, instrumentation and the like, we also have bees, chickens, a solar energy collection system, and a lot of hops.



We grow hops at our laboratory for a couple of reasons. First, we like beer! Second, hops are one of the best building shade plants around. They love sunshine and keep it off your building. Their transpiration provides an additional cooling mechanism to the building surface. Rather than take my word for it, check out these pictures.

We coaxed three small roots (for you brewers, Cascade, Centennial and Nugget hop varieties) to spread over the south façade of our lab. The two temperature readings show temperatures on the shaded and unshaded wall surfaces of the building. The building is a light gray, but it still absorbs sufficient solar energy to double the temperature difference between the interior and exterior wall surfaces, therefore doubling the wall-associated air conditioning load. Our leafy exterior window “shutters” (which still allow the windows to open) are cool to look through as well as cooling to the psyche.

As a risome (some kind of plant terminology I’m not qualified to describe in an accurate manner), hops die back to their roots for the winter, allowing the winter sunshine to beneficially warm the building skin. The hops begin growing as soon as the spring soil temperature is sufficiently warm, just in time for summer shading. And in the fall, they give us hops for brewing!

As home brewers, we use malted barley grain to make a sugary solution called wort. WE, the superior beings, create a five gallon, sugary paradise of a world for OUR little subjects, WE call yeast. As WE add a teaspoon of yeast to their worted promise land, OUR little world explodes with yeasty hustle and bustle. To the yeast, it is Nirvana, Eden, and Shangri-La combined. Sugar is all they need to live and thrive. The wort is a hive of activity with OUR yeast population growing exponentially. After a few days, continuing population growth can no longer be sustained by the remaining sugar. And even worse, excrement produced by the yeast reaches a poisonous level that collapses and kills the population enmass. As OUR yeast civilization crumbles and drops to the bottom of their finite, five gallon world, WE have what we want ...BEER!... And so OUR little yeast subjects have fulfilled their destiny. They have consumed and degraded their sugary world’s resources into a toilet of toxic waste.



Is that our purpose, too? Is it our Creator's desire for us to consume and degrade the planet's resources into a toxic mess? Could our reason for being, be to create a tasty brew for consumption at a Superior Being's tailgate party? And if our purpose in life is to consume and degrade the planet's resources as fast as possible, doesn't that mean those of us who are working to reduce consumption, increase efficiency, and achieve a world that can comfortably sustain human life for a long time are working against the Creator's wishes? And doesn't this mean we will be going to Hell?

Well, maybe this is the case. But if so, I want to be first in line to go to hell. Most likely I'm going to hell anyway, but probably not for my puny efforts in renewable energy, recycling, water conservation and energy efficiency. It will be for running the gate at a Jefferson Airplane concert in Ann Arbor in 1971. Or maybe because one time too many, I chose paper instead of plastic, or is it the other way around?

In the words of Ginger Baker on the Blind Faith album, "Do right, use your head, everybody must be fed". And if you go to hell for your efforts, so be it.