

When things do not go as we had hoped or would like it seems to be human nature to just point the finger at someone else and go on with our business. This is particularly true when it comes to environmental issues. Unfortunately, as the old adage says, “every time you point a finger, the rest are pointing back at you.”

Environmentalism has earned an unfortunate reputation for this very reason. Often people who pride themselves on their concern for our environment jump to the assumption that big business is to blame for all the ills in the world. So many self-described “environmentalists” have screamed the evils of capitalism for so long that the true message of caring for our world is being lost.

The results of this over-dramatization have been two-fold. First, a deaf ear is turned by many, who while, caring deeply about the future of our environment are tired of hearing the shrieks. Consequently, they abandon worthwhile environmental causes to avoid the fray. Second, many do hear the message that capitalism is the cause of all of the environmental ills. These folks either doggedly pursue businesses, demanding they correct their ardent behavior, or they watch as others do just that, comfortable in the knowledge that they are not to blame for any of the problems.

Unfortunately the environment has suffered as a result. There is no doubt that the environmental movement has educated the world, but there is reason for concern that the message is not being told wholly and truthfully. Remember, when we point that finger, there are three more pointed back at ourselves.

For years the government has worked with large businesses to curb the harmful effects their practices could have on the environment. As a result point sources of pollution have been dramatically reduced. A point source pollutant is one, which comes from a single, identifiable location. For instance, if the pollutant, Chemical XYZ, is discovered in a stream, and along that stream are two companies who discharge wastewater into the stream, whichever company has Chemical XYZ as a byproduct of its manufacturing would be the point source of the pollutant. Once identified, this company can be required to correct its pollution problem. Because of the ease of which point source pollutants can be controlled, they are becoming less and less of an environmental concern.

The larger concern lies in non-point source pollutants. These are pollutants that come from any number of sources and cannot necessarily be pinpointed. For instance, if a body of water develops an algae bloom as a result of high nitrogen content in the water, it may be difficult to identify from where the nitrogen came. If along the stream there is a golf course, 15 homes, and two cattle farms it would be difficult to ascertain just who polluted the water, and it could be that all were contributors.

This is why there is real concern that the environmental message may be getting lost. We all have a tremendous impact on our surroundings, making it foolhardy to shift the blame. Each of us can do our part to ensure a healthy environment.

One of the best places to begin is in our own homes. Adjusting our kitchen practices can actually have a quite positive effect on the environment. Most of us are not vigilant enough at seeing that fats, oils and grease (FOG) stay out of our sewer lines. Few homeowners would knowingly dump these products down the drain, but most do not give enough thought to what counts as FOG. The butter drippings left on the plate from the baked potato, the milk in the bottom of the ice cream bowl, and the olive oil salad dressing left on the salad plate all count, and few of us make the effort to wipe these away with paper towels before rinsing our dishes in the sink. Unfortunately, with countless homeowners putting just the occasional bit of FOG into the sewers, the risk of a blockage, and sewer overflow is great. To try to reduce the risk of sewer overflow, a sewer ordinance exists which demands that nothing in excess of 100 parts per million of FOG be released into the sanitary sewer. If every homeowner does their part, we can dramatically reduce the chances of sewage based pollutants entering our waterways and damaging our environment.

Another place you can do your part to ensure a healthy environment is your own backyard. Good gardening practices help protect our water supplies. It is often assumed that the simple avoidance of chemicals when gardening is all it takes to be environmentally sound. Unfortunately this is not true, even bare ground can contribute to poor water quality as when water hits the ground, soil and things like pet waste are carried off into waterways. More important than avoiding chemicals all together, is to use them wisely. Only apply chemicals as directed on the label, and never apply at levels more than as directed.

By adopting sound environmental practices both indoors and out, you will do more for the health of our environment than anyone who simply points an accusatory finger.