



## Sustainability Guidelines

This legal document is signed by all Ecovillage (EV) residents and describes what we mean when we say “sustainable.”

In theory, the simple statements below are sufficient to govern life at Ecovillage. Since all residents agree to abide by the Guidelines, no other enforcement of ecologically acceptable behavior is necessary. In reality, we expect confusion and even argument as to what these broad statements really mean, so we’ve also included a Sustainability Guidelines Explanations section and have linked each item below to its explanation.

If you have comments or questions, we’d love to hear them. Your feedback will help us refine the Sustainability Guidelines to be even more complete and clear.

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- **Ecovillage is committed to working in the following ways to make itself a sustainable system.**
  - **Ecovillage will look holistically at the issues of sustainability to create a sustainable culture that takes into account all impacts of its actions and acts to preserve the Earth for the future.**
  - **Ecovillage will strive to rely only upon renewable resources, and to use them at a rate less than their replacement.**
  - **Ecovillage will try to understand and minimize its negative impact on global ecological systems.**
  - **Ecovillage will attempt to preserve and rebuild healthy ecosystems and have a positive impact on biodiversity.**
  - **Ecovillage will try to create a closed resource loop where byproducts are reintegrated as useful resources, thus attempting to minimize waste products, especially those toxic or radioactive.**
  - **Ecovillage will try to avoid exploiting people and other cultures.**
  - **Ecovillage will strive to achieve negative population growth from reproduction.**
  - **As a member of Ecovillage I have read and understand the above and agree to help Ecovillage work toward these goals. I agree to take these ideals into account when making decisions for Ecovillage and for myself while a member of Ecovillage.**

(Adapted from Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage with their permission)

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### Sustainability Guideline Explanations

While the brevity of the Sustainability Guidelines makes them easy to read, they don’t give nearly as much detail as most people would like. These more complete explanations help remedy this problem and let potential members know what to expect of life at EV.

For each Guideline, we explain some of the environmental thinking that underlies our beliefs, although we expect that

readers of this document have heard of some basic concepts already. Then, we describe the lifestyle impact that this Guideline might have on members, since concrete examples often give a better picture of our meaning than lofty statements.

Finally, if some of the jargon seems obscure, don't worry! We've even written a [glossary](#) that explains our eco-buzzwords to the uninitiated and any word that is linked below leads to its definition.

**Ecovillage will look holistically at the issues of sustainability to create a sustainable culture that takes into account all impacts of its actions and acts to preserve the Earth for the future.**

**Explanation:** Our goal is to create a culture where it is common practice for people to examine the full impacts of their actions. Examining the sum total of how we affect the Earth includes thinking about our impacts both present and future, and consideration of large scale as well as localized effects. Given this examination, people are then responsible for acting to maintain or increase the sustainability of the culture. By inquiring into the far-reaching and systematic effects of our actions as well as the visible and direct impacts we can better understand how to choose the more sustainable solution.

**Lifestyle Impact:** Creating a culture that examines all effects of its actions means that members should be prepared to put more care and thought into decisions than is the cultural norm. This may also mean more community involvement in personal decisions that have ecological consequences, since crafting holistic solutions to our problems may require a synthesis of many different viewpoints. In addition, members may often find the need to find alternative or creative solutions to meeting their needs and wants sustainably. Of course, this is a central purpose of Ecovillage: to provide the assistance, resources, and environment necessary to help people meet their needs in a comfortable and sustainable way.

**Ecovillage will strive to rely only upon renewable resources, and to use them at a rate less than their replacement.**

**Explanation:** Obviously, the sustainability of a culture is uncertain if that culture relies on something that will not last. Since the world economy is entirely dependent upon a few nonrenewable resources, major social effects can be expected when these resources run out. Even if alternative resources are discovered or developed, the effects of the withdrawal of key resources could be immensely damaging to ecological systems. However, some use of non-renewable resources is probably acceptable as long as sustainable alternatives are available as well and that the use of these doesn't cause other problems. Part of the definition of "renewable" means that our use of any resource will have to be brought into alignment with its replacement rate. For instance, this will mean using wood only as fast as the forests grow, building topsoil instead of depleting it, and using water only at the rate it is replenished in surface catchments or aquifers.

**Lifestyle Impact:** The major impact here will be the need to end reliance on fossil fuels, which are naturally replaced at a small fraction of our current rate of consumption. The main uses of fossil fuels are transportation, heating, electricity production, cooking, small engines, water heating, petrochemicals, and plastics. At EV members should expect to use renewably powered vehicles or muscle-powered transportation such as bicycles and horses. Ownership of personal vehicles may be limited with vehicle needs being met by a vehicle co-op. Long-distance travel would be encouraged to be by train since it is the most efficient of mass transit systems available. Homes will be built to use solar energy and thus minimize the need for energy inputs for heating. These needs could then be supplied by burning wood or other biomass. Electricity production should be expected to be from hydro, wind, biomass, and solar power sources and consumption will be well below the European norm. Solar cookers and hydrogen, biomass or biogas stoves will satisfy our cooking needs. Human-powered devices could eliminate small engines, or when necessary they could be operated on renewable electric, hydrogen, or biofuel inputs. Solar water heating can be supplemented with a hydrogen or biofuel backup. Use of disposable plastic would be reduced dramatically while some plastics might still be used when the products have long lifetimes. For the long term, ending reliance on petroleum-based plastics would be our goal.

Also, purchasing products manufactured with or transported by fossil fuel accounts for much indirect fossil fuel use. Given this, members should expect to buy things locally as much as possible and to take into account the embodied energy in a product when making a purchase. This will mean eating food locally grown and in season. Organically grown food will be the norm since inorganic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides rely on cheap fossil fuels for their production. Businesses at EV should make an effort to find local markets for their products and avoid shipping heavy items long distances.

While not projected to run out as soon as petroleum, non-renewable resources such as metals and other minerals can be considered finite in practical terms. More importantly, the increasingly destructive and energy-intensive practices used in the mining industry causes us to consider our use of any item produced with these materials. When using such materials the embodied energy of a product (the total amount of energy needed to extract its raw materials, produce it, and ship it to its place of use) compared to the length of its life should be taken into account and attempts should be made to use a more renewable resource. Obviously, these products should be recycled and attempts should be made to buy recycled goods.

Water systems at EV may tie in to local water systems but will probably rely on catchments, cisterns, and wells. Water can be conserved through the use of composting toilets and gray water systems. People will be expected to be aware of and minimize their household, industrial, and agricultural water uses. Water use will also be impacted by the energy available to pump and heat water. EV will avoid contaminating surface or underground water supplies by preventing toxins or pathogens from entering these systems.

Soil building will be a major goal of EV's agricultural program. Onsite farming practices will need to maintain and build our soil. Members should expect to get the majority of their food from onsite and from other local sustainable farms, and purchase of food transported over long distances or from unsustainable systems should be minimized.

Long term, our timber needs should be met by sustainably harvesting onsite or locally. While supplies last, we can reduce our use of new timber by using mainstream waste products such as slab wood from local mills. We can also recycle lumber from old barns and houses in the area. Use of timber cut in unsustainable ways or imported over long distances should be minimized. Paper should be conserved and acquired from recycled or renewable sources now available such as kenaf, hemp, agricultural waste, and sustainably harvested trees.

**Ecovillage will try to understand and minimize its negative impact on global ecological systems.**

**Explanation:** Global ecological systems are complex, delicate, and affect all life on the planet. In turn, they are affected by all activity on the planet. We do not fully understand how our actions affect these systems. Some major issues include global climate change, destruction of species diversity, and ozone layer depletion. Among other things, the carbon dioxide produced by burning fossil fuels, the methane produced by agriculture, and deforestation all increase the likelihood of global climate change. Ecosystems need to maintain their diversity to survive, but pollution and habitat destruction threaten this diversity.

**Lifestyle Impact:** Again, the main issue at hand is fossil fuel use, and the same solutions mentioned previously apply. Ecovillage will probably keep many fewer domesticated ruminant animals, especially cows, since among other negative effects they produce a great amount of methane. This may mean less consumption of meat and dairy products than the European average.

**Ecovillage will attempt to preserve and rebuild healthy ecosystems and have a positive impact on biodiversity.**

**Explanation:** As with global systems, local ecosystems are complex and interdependent. Ecosystem health is not easily measurable or even definable. In general, ecosystems are healthy if they have a diversity of life forms acting in a balanced, stable way. Ecosystem health and biodiversity are important both for global ecological health and for the stability and resources they offer humanity. Many believe ecosystems have intrinsic value, aside from any benefits humans may derive from them, and deserve to be protected for that reason alone.

**Lifestyle Impact:** EV will make efforts to sustain local ecosystems by reintroducing native species, preserving and expanding wildlife habitat, and restoring prairie and forest biomes. We can help maintain biodiversity in our agricultural systems by growing heirloom and endangered varieties of food plants and using open-pollinated seeds that store genetic diversity. While animals can be a vital part of a permacultural system, the use of animal products will be limited by the resources available.

Members should take into account their impact on distant ecosystems when they purchase imported products. We should attempt to buy things produced with a strong respect for ecosystem health similar to our own and to minimize our use of products that cause ecosystem degradation.

**Ecovillage will try to create a closed resource loop where byproducts are reintegrated as useful resources, thus attempting to minimize waste products, especially those that are toxic or radioactive.**

**Explanation:** In nature, the end products of any living process are the inputs to the further creation of life. Using nature as a model we can try to create systems where we reuse our by-products and thus minimize what must be discarded. This will minimize the use of valuable land for landfills. Toxic wastes are those that damage life and the ecosystem, and should obviously be avoided. Ultimately, we strive for all the things we use in our life to be durable, recyclable, and/or biodegradable.

**Lifestyle Impact:** Members should expect to do such things as composting kitchen waste and using composting toilets to recycle human waste. Members should try to minimize packaging and disposability in products they buy. Toxic substances such as used motor oil and batteries should be dealt with properly to minimize their negative impacts. In the long term we hope to find non-toxic alternatives to these products or to change our method of answering the perceived need which these products currently satisfy.

Members should also try to be aware of the waste their purchases generate indirectly at the manufacturing site of a product.

**Ecovillage will try to avoid exploiting people and other cultures.**

**Explanation:** The exploitation of people is intimately linked with the exploitation of the planet. Ecosystem degradation from activities of wealthy cultures often takes place in impoverished areas. Oppressive economic systems mean that disadvantaged people often have no choice but to impact the ecosphere negatively simply to survive. The wide gap between different standards of living causes degradation of the ecosphere as poorer cultures strive for a consumerist lifestyle. We will never have a sustainable and stable ecological system while such a wide economic gap exists.

**Lifestyle Impact:** Members are expected to take into account how their actions, such as buying imported products, contribute to the oppression of peoples throughout our bioregion, our continent, and around the world. Imported items deemed necessary or desirable will be purchased from the most socially progressive source available. In addition, there may be a call to boycott certain materials, products, or companies as part of our social and ecological goals.

**Ecovillage will strive to achieve negative population growth from reproduction.**

**Explanation:** Population levels are at the heart of all discussions of sustainability. The sustainability of a given activity depends entirely on how many people are acting. The world's population is probably already over carrying capacity and even with reductions in birthrates now, population will continue to grow for many decades. Given current projections we believe

that the world needs to peacefully reduce its population so that everyone can achieve a reasonable standard of living sustainably. If population is not reduced voluntarily it will probably occur from such things as famines, epidemics and wars which are intimately tied to our current ecologically destructive behavior.

**Lifestyle Impact:** Since Europe is already on a path to stable population growth, reproduction issues probably will not have a big impact on members' lives. The creation of opportunities for individuals to help in the rearing of children that are not theirs biologically will assist us in creating this social climate. Nurturing our children properly will help them grow up with a respect for ecology and each other.

(Adapted from Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage with their permission – v1.1 updated 7 Dec 2017)

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## Glossary

### **Anthropogenic**

– resulting from the influence of human beings on nature.

### **Aquifers**

– layers of rock or soil able to hold or transmit much water.

### **Biodiversity**

– diversity of all living organisms.

### **Biofuel**

– any fuel made from nonfossil organic matter, such as vegetable oil or ethanol.

### **Biogas**

– methane obtained from decomposing organic matter.

### **Biomass**

– any organic material.

### **Biomes**

– a given type of environment, such as tundra, forest, or wetlands.

### **Bioregion**

– a specific region containing life.

### **Catchment**

– something that catches rainfall.

### **Ecological**

– the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings (i.e. living things in their environment).

### **Ecosphere**

– region of space with planets where living things can exist.

### **Gray Water**

– washing water

(**Black Water** = sewage water; **Fresh Water** = natural or tap water).

### **Hemp**

– a tall, widely cultivated herb of the mulberry family with tough bast fiber used especially for cordage.

**Kenaf**

– an East Indian hibiscus widely cultivated for its fiber.

**Pathogens**

– an agent of disease such as a virus or bacterium.

**Permacultural**

– permanent culture.

**Petrochemicals**

– a substance industrially obtained from petroleum or natural gas.

**Ruminant**

– animals that chew their cud and produce methane.

**Slab Wood**

– rounded edges of trees that cannot be cut for industrial wood.