

# The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**  
**You often say that trees are the answer. What's the question?**

I think trees are the answer to a lot of questions about our future, including:



Dr. Moore

- How can we advance to a more sustainable economy based on renewable fuels and materials?

- How can we reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere?

- How can developing countries reverse deforestation and do more to protect the environment?

The answer is, by using more wood—both as a substitute for non-renewable materials and as paper products for printing, packaging and sanitation—and, as a result, providing an economic incentive for countries around the world to grow more trees.

On the surface, it may seem logical that we can “save” forests by reducing wood consumption. But there are problems with this approach.

First, even if people stop using wood for fuel or building materials, they'll still need warmth, food and shelter. All the likely substitutes—including steel, concrete, plastics and fossil fuels—are non-renewable and result in higher emissions of greenhouse gases. Reducing wood consumption automatically means using more of

these materials.

Second, much of the land that's used to grow trees could just as easily be cleared for farming or housing. Less demand for wood means less incentive to sustain vast forested areas, especially in developing countries.

There's a common misperception that per capita consumption of energy and resources is directly related to negative environmental impact. We're told that, because the average North American consumes 80 times as much as the average Bangladeshi, we cause 80 times the damage. But all one need do is travel to Bangladesh to see the impact of poverty on the environment. Forests are stripped bare for subsistence farming, rivers are fouled for lack of sewage treatment, and wildlife is severely reduced through poaching. These people need more resources, not less.

It's ironic that so many environmental groups promote reduced wood consumption. As a sensible environmentalist, I believe we should be planting more trees and using more wood—the world's most renewable resource—while building upon and sharing everything we've learned about forest sustainability.

*Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to [Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com](mailto:Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com).*