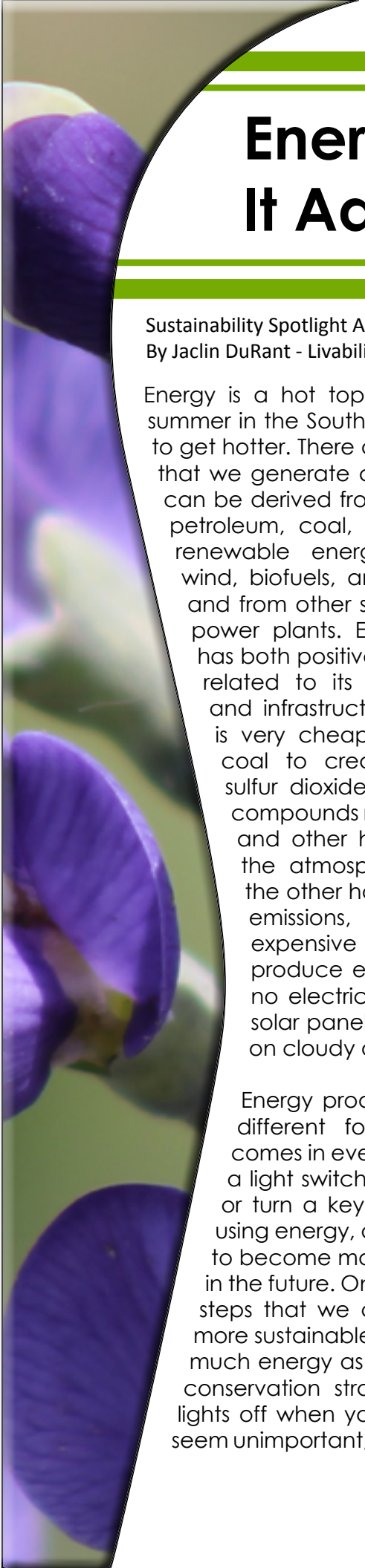

Energy Conservation - It Adds Up!

Sustainability Spotlight Article Excerpt From Connections For Sustainability Newsletter Issue 25: April 2014
By Jaclin DuRant - Livability Educator

Energy is a hot topic right now, and with summer in the South on our horizon, it's sure to get hotter. There are many different ways that we generate and use energy. Energy can be derived from fossil fuel sources like petroleum, coal, and natural gas; from renewable energy sources like solar, wind, biofuels, and hydroelectric dams; and from other sources such as nuclear power plants. Every source of energy has both positive and negative aspects related to its collection, generation, and infrastructure. For example, coal is very cheap to mine, but burning coal to create electricity releases sulfur dioxide, one of the chemical compounds responsible for acid rain, and other harmful substances into the atmosphere. Solar energy on the other hand, creates no harmful emissions, but is still relatively expensive and relies on the sun to produce electricity, meaning that no electricity is being created by solar panels at night and very little on cloudy days.

Energy production comes in many different forms, and energy use comes in even more. Anytime we flip a light switch, press a phone button, or turn a key in the ignition, we are using energy, and that energy is going to become more and more expensive in the future. One of the most important steps that we can all take towards a more sustainable future is to conserve as much energy as we can. Simple energy conservation strategies like turning the lights off when you leave the room may seem unimportant, but let's do some math: South Carolina's average cost of electricity is 11 cents per KWh. The chandelier in my living room has five bulbs in it. If I leave five traditional 100 watt bulbs running for an hour, it costs me six cents. I may not be very concerned about six cents, but if I leave that chandelier on an hour a day for a year, it costs me $20.08. Twenty dollars also may not seem like much, but if every person in South Carolina left those five bulbs on for an extra hour every day, we would spend $95,878,767.12 in a single year. The inverse is also true: by turning all of those extra lights off when they aren't being used, and making the switch to more energy efficient light bulbs, we can save a lot of money and a lot of energy. On the environmental side of the equation, to power those extra light bulbs for a year, we would need to burn more than 350 thousand tons of coal and would release more than 600 thousand tons of Carbon Dioxide into the atmosphere.

As we move towards a more sustainable future, energy conservation and efficiency will play a huge role. Visit the US Department of Energy's web site at here for resources to help you conserve energy at home, and if you'd like to learn more and be a part of the discussion about the future of energy use, join us Monday, April 21, for our screening of Switch during Sustainable Cinema at 6PM.

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