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The Green library movement: An overview of green library literature and actions from 1979 to the future of green libraries

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Abstract

The creation of green libraries is approaching a tipping point, generating a Green Library Movement, which is comprised of librarians, libraries, cities, towns, college and university campuses committed to greening libraries and reducing their environmental impact. Constructing a green library building using a performance standard like LEED is a way some libraries are choosing to become green and sustainable. Environmental challenges like energy depletion and climate change will influence the type of information resources and programs libraries will provide to their communities.

Keywords: Green Library Movement, green, stainable, libraries, programs, LEED, environment, peak oil, climate change

TIME writer Bryan Walsh believes the year 2007 will be remembered as "the tipping point when public understanding of the existential threat of climate change reached critical mass" (Walsh, 2007, para. 1). Malcolm Gladwell (2000) in his bestselling book, *The Tipping Point,* explains that ideas and behaviors can spread like viruses (p. 7). Eventually the idea or behavior reaches a tipping point also known as "the critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point" (p. 12). In sociology the term tipping point refers to the moment when something previously unique becomes common (p. 12). Around the country the idea and behavior of creating green libraries is approaching a tipping point and transforming into a library movement. The Green Library Movement has been in existence for over 15 years. The Movement emerged in the early 1990s and gained popularity in the library profession around 2003. It is comprised of a growing number of librarians, libraries, cities, towns, college and university campuses committed to greening libraries by reducing their environmental impact on the planet. This innovation is happening by building green library buildings, by greening existing library facilities, providing green library services, and embracing environmentally supportive and sustainable practices within the library.

Green Definitions

Throughout this article the terms "green" and "sustainable" are used and need to be defined. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) the term "green" is defined as "pertaining to, or supporting environmentalism" (p. 811). The term "sustainable"relates to "forms of human economic activity and culture that do not lead to environmental degradation, esp. avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources" (Oxford English, 2008).

Green Library Literature

The amount of information available on green libraries and green library practices is limited but continues to grow. The earliest articles on green libraries appeared in the 1990s. The *Wilson Library Bulletin's* February 1991 issue featured a special section on "Libraries and the Environment." James and Suzanne LeRue wrote the lead article entitled "The Green Librarian" (1991). In this article, the LeRues explained in detail how to be environmentally supportive at home and in the library. Three other articles were included in the special section. "Finding the Trees in the Forest: Environmental Information Sources" by Tom Watson (1991) pulled together a list of groups, agencies and publications that focused on the environment and environmental information. "Celebrating Earth Day all Year Long" by Linda Rome (1991) provided a history of Earth Day, as well as ideas on how to keep the public's attention on environmental issues all year. "Noise in the Library: Effects and Control" by Ann Eagan (1991) examined noise pollution in the library. The Viewpoint section of the February issue included an additional environmental article, "The Library as an Environmental Alternative (Among Other Things)" by Steven Smith (1991). Smith discussed the spatial limits of the library and nature, and the role libraries need to play in preserving both. The *Wilson Library Bulletin* environmental articles are significant because they were published shortly after the 20th anniversary of the original Earth Day celebration, which received an enormous amount of media coverage. The articles represent the nationwide rekindling of interest in a green environmental movement that "thinks globally but acts locally."

In 1991 a group of environmentally concerned non-profit workers from the Green Library in Berkeley, California and librarians from the University of Idaho Library in Moscow, Idaho decided to publish a professional journal that would promote environmental literacy. A global editorial board was assembled "to create an international exchange forum for librarians, information consultants, civic groups, organizations, educators and individuals" (Jankowska, 2007, p. 1). The first issue of *The Green Library Journal: Environmental Topics in the Information World (GLJ)* appeared in January 1992 (Jankowska, 2007). The American Library Association's newly formed Task Force on the Environment (TFOE) contributed significantly to the first issue of *GLJ*. The 1992 issue began with an editorial by Maria Anna Jankowska, and included practical library articles, "The Greening of ALA Conferences" by Nancy N. Pope; "ALA's Task Force on Environment" by Terry Link; "Special Libraries and Environmental Information" by Pat Murray; "Oh, How Green is Your Library" by Monte L. Steiger; "Recycling Opportunity: Laser Printer Cartridges" by Ted Kruse; and "Environmental Impacts" by Patricia Cruse.

A year later the article "Green Librarianship: A Revolt against Change" by C. Atton appeared in *Assistant Librarian* in November 1993. In the article Atton (1993) describes the green librarianship activities in the US and warns librarians in the UK against embracing a business-consumer model in the library. It is not until ten years later, that the next green library articles appear. *Public Libraries* published, "It's Not Easy Being Green But it Sure is Fun: Sustainability Programming at the Ann Arbor District Library" by Amy Cantú and Beth Andersen (2003). Cantú and Andersen focused on a program series titled "Sustaining Ann Arbor: Think Globally, Act Locally." Some of the highlights from the program included alternative fuel vehicles, a wildlife ecology puppet show, a sustainable home tour, green journaling, and the showing of the film *Escape from Affluenza*. The Library's position as a community center and its mission to serve as an educational resource "proved to be ideal for exploring the interconnected topic of sustainability" (Cantú & Anderson, 2003, p. 243).

Library Journal has been one of the leaders in reporting on green libraries and the greening of libraries. In 2003 *Library Journal* published "The New Green Standard" by Bill Brown. Brown (2003) discussed the emerging trend of green libraries and proclaimed that libraries were on the cutting edge of green design. The article "Public Input Yields Greener Library Design" by Louise Levy Schaper appeared in the December 15, 2003 issue. The author described how in 2005 the Fayetteville Public Library's Blair Library was the first building in Arkansas to be a registered LEED building (Schaper, 2003). The article "Keeping Track of Green Libraries" by Jennifer Pinkowski appeared in the September 15, 2007, issue. Pinkowski reviewed the *Green Libraries* website (greenlibraries.org), which is building a directory of green libraries. *Library Journal*

recently published "Go Green" by Jane C. Neale (2008), in which Neale describes how libraries can be more eco-friendly. In the June 15, 2008 issue *Library Journal* ran "Green Libraries are Local" by Francine Fialkoff, an editorial that discussed LJ's Design Institute West *Going Green* seminar held on May 9, 2008 at the San Francisco Public Library's Main Library. Fialkoff described how California, San Francisco, and the San Francisco Public Library were all on an environmental sustainability track that should be held up as a model for everyone.

The Oregon Library Association dedicated the entire winter 2007 issue of the *OLA Quarterly* to "Going Green: Libraries and Sustainability." The articles embraced a variety of green topics including "Institutionalizing Sustainability: An Emerging Trend" by Connie J. Bennett; "A How-To: Conduct an Environmental Audit in Your Library" by Judith Norton; "Going for the Gold: Building a Sustainable LEED Library" by June Mikkelsen; "Getting There is Half the Fun: Alternative Transportation and Oregon Library Employees" by Jey Wann; "From Worthless to Worthy: Turning Media Trash into Recycling Treasure" by Maureen Cole; and "Green Reading: Resources for the Sustainability-Minded" by Diane Sotak and Annie Zeidman-Karpinski. *American Libraries'* April 2008 issue featured the article "Going for Green" by Dorthy Waterfill Trotter. She discussed three environmentally friendly libraries and offered tips on how librarians could make their libraries greener (Trotter, 2008). The October 2008 issue of ALA Techsource's *Smart Libraries* newsletter featured an article by Tom Peters titled "Green Library PCs", which describes how libraries can reduce their computers' environmental impact and energy usage (Peters, 2008).

What are Green Libraries?

When librarians talk about green libraries what usually comes to mind are green library buildings. The California Integrated Waste Management Board defines a green or sustainable building as "a structure that is designed, built, renovated, operated, or reused in an ecological and resource-efficient manner" (California Integrated, 2008). Interest in green library design intensified in December 2007 when the Library Journal Design Institute hosted the *Going Green* seminar in Chicago, Illinois. At the event architects, city planners, and librarians shared the latest developments and cutting-edge solutions being adopted in green library buildings (Library Journal, 2007). Green buildings are measured according to a rating system like the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification system, which was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. Since the introduction of LEED in 2000, it has become the U.S. national standard for commercial and institutional buildings (U.S. Green, 2008).

LEED is considered a performance standard, which means it allows a building owner or planner to choose how to meet certain benchmark numbers without prescribing specific measures. It is a point-based system in which projects earn LEED points for meeting green building criteria. The six credit categories for new building construction are sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, and innovation in design (U.S. Green, n.d.). There are currently six types of building certification under LEED including LEED for New Construction (LEED-NC), LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI), LEED for Core and Shell (LEED-CS), LEED for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB), LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND), and LEED for Homes (LEED-H) (Yudelson, 2007). The LEED rating system is progressive with four levels of certification: Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Each certification level has 32 categories of environmental design and energy concerns for a maximum point value of 69. Buildings must score a minimum number of points above "standard building" performance levels to qualify for certification (Yudelson, 2007). For example, a basic LEED-NC certified building must score at least 26 points in the six credit categories. To certify for a Silver rating, a building would require 33 points, for Gold 39 points, and for Platinum rating a minimum of 52 points (Yudelson, 2007). Platinum certification is difficult to achieve. In 2006 there were fewer than 20 Platinum LEED-NC projects. The Barrington Area Library set a goal of being the first public library in Illinois to receive Platinum certification (Barrington, 2008). Unfortunately due to the economic downturn on November 4, 2008, Barrington Area citizens voted against the $34.3 million bond issue to fund the Library Improvement Plan (Doyle, 2008). Currently in the US there are only two LEED-certified Platinum library buildings: the William J. Clinton Presidential Library

in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Lake View Terrace Branch Library, part of the Los Angeles Public Library District. The Clinton Presidential Library originally received Silver Certification under the USGBC's LEED-NC program. In 2007, the Library achieved LEED-EB Platinum certification by adding additional green cleaning and recycling programs, climate-neutral and energy efficiency strategies, water-wise landscaping and a green roof (Pilloton, 2007). The Platinum certified Lake View Terrace Branch Library opened in 2003. Some of the Library's green features include: natural daylighting, shading to filter direct sunlight, solar panels, sensors that control indoor lighting for improved energy efficiency, and bamboo wood flooring. The Library is located close to electric car charging stations and mass transit. It also offers a bike rack and a horse-hitching post (Los Angeles Public, 2005).

The push to build green libraries continues to grow. In 2008 Massachusetts cities were offered $5 million to build or renovate green libraries. The State Board of Library Commissioners plans to award construction grants to 31 Massachusetts cities and towns. The selected libraries must follow LEED design standards to qualify for the grant money (Crimaldi, 2008). Chicago, Illinois, is clearly the leader in green library building. Chicago prides itself on being one of the first cities to incorporate environmentally friendly practices into public buildings. The city has even created its own building standard known as The Chicago Standard, which is based on selected points from the LEED Green Building Rating System. Beginning in 2002 the city of Chicago decided to use green building technologies in the construction of municipal buildings such as libraries and police stations. The first green library, Budlong Woods Library, opened in spring 2003, followed by the West Englewood Library in the summer 2003, and the Oriole Park Library in spring 2004 (City of Chicago, 2004). By December 2007 seven Chicago branch libraries had received certification with more planned.

Why Build Green Libraries?

There are several reasons why libraries would want to build green or incorporate green features into their buildings. First, the cost of constructing green buildings has become affordable. It is now possible for libraries to build green buildings on conventional budgets. Second, most readily available energy resources are finite resources. It is vital to the health of the planet and our libraries' budgets that we use these energy sources prudently. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, U.S. residential and commercial buildings account for 68% of electricity consumption and 39% of total energy use (Yudelson, 2007, p. 7). Third, it is important that we reduce the carbon footprint of our buildings. The term carbon footprint is defined as "the total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2)" (Time for Change, 2008). The U.S. Green Building Council reports that U.S. buildings produce 30% of greenhouse gas emissions (Yudelson, 2007, p. 7). Because green building practices have become more affordable, now is a good time to choose to build green. However, what about libraries that want to build green but cannot afford the cost of a new building? Renovating an existing library building is an option which could even lead to LEED certification under the LEED for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB) option. But for budget strapped libraries in these tough economic times, even renovating may not be a possibility.

A simple green step that libraries can do for the health of the planet and their employees is to quit using toxic chemical cleaners and switch to environmentally friendly cleaning products. In May 2008, Illinois schools made that change after the state passed the Green Cleaning Schools Act, which required schools to use only certified green cleaners that met the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency guidelines (Rousseau, 2008). According to Ken Runkle, a toxicologist at the Illinois Department of Public Health, some cleaners can trigger allergies and asthma attacks in children. Green cleaners emit fewer fumes, and some are even made with plant-based ingredients, such as soy. While Illinois law now requires schools to use environmentally friendly products, there is currently no penalty for schools that choose not to comply (Rousseau, 2008).

Green Library Programs

Librarians all around the country are climbing aboard the green library band wagon by offering green library programs. On May 24, 2007, James LaRue, author of the 1991 article "Green Librarianship" and Director of the Philip S. Miller Library in Castle Rock, Colorado hosted the free public seminar "Building Green: Trends and Opportunities in Douglas County." A panel of local facilities and energy managers were assembled to talk about green projects currently being developed in Douglas County, and to brainstorm on green projects they would like to create (LaRue, 2007). The METRO (Metropolitan New York Library Council) Green Librarianship Special Interest Group (SIG) held its first meeting on November 1, 2007. The well attended meeting was organized by Brita Servaes, Undergraduate Services Librarian at the New School, and Rita Ormsby, Information Services Librarian at Baruch College's Newman Library. The creation of the SIG came out of a Green Libraries discussion held at the August 2007 Library Camp at Baruch College (Metro Collaborate, 2008b). The SIG was developed for librarians and staff members interested in adopting green practices such as recycling in libraries, and providing resources and information on green living and green working to the wider library communities (Metro Collaborate, 2008a).

During summer 2008, the Goshen Public Library in Goshen, New York, created an adult summer reading program focusing on environmental issues and activities titled "Change your world @ your library" (American Library, 2008b). In October 2008 the Memorial Hall Library of Andover, Massachusetts, hosted Go Green @ your library, a series of weekly programs focusing on environmentalism. Topics included green transportation, climate changes, and green living (American Library, 2008b).

Green Library Courses

Just in time for Earth Day 2008 the first online continuing education course, *Eco-Librarians: Changing Our Communities One Step at a Time*, was offered at UW-Madison SLIS. The three-week course was taught by Pam Bosben, the Director of Wisconsin's first LEED library located in Cross Plains, Wisconsin. The course offered a forum for exchanging ideas on how to be effective eco-librarians using green practices and environmentally conscious programming (UW-SLIS, 2007). In December 2008 the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) plans to offer *The Greener Library*, an online class. The two-day course will focus on current practices and standards for evaluating the environmental impact of library facilities and will examine the environmental considerations of operating procedures and costs (SOLINET, 2008).

Greening Library Associations

The Task Force on the Environment (TFOE) has been working on greening ALA for almost 20 years. TFOE was established in 1989 in recognition of the 20th Anniversary of Earth Day, and is a Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) Task Force. Terry Link was the first TFOE Coordinator and a driving force in the creation of the Task Force. The organization had two objectives: "1) to make librarians and others more aware of diverse environmental information sources; and 2) to recognize environmental concerns within libraries and seek solutions to them" (Link, 1992, p. 53). Since 1990, TFOE has hosted a variety of green library programs at ALA conferences. Programs include: "How Green is Your Library: Environmentalists at Work" (1990); "Environmentally and Socially Responsible Business: Finding the Information to Make the Decision to Buy or Invest" (1996); "Earth Day in the 21st Century: Environmental Activism, with Denis Hays, Founder of the First Earth Day in 1970" (2001); "Sustaining Libraries for the Future: Energy Efficiency, Friendly Buildings, and the Libraries Sustainability" (2001); "Clear the Air and Water: Environmental Selections for Children, the Public and Academic Libraries" (2003); "Are You Missing Any Information? Speaking and Publishing Freely on the Environment" (2004); "Greening of the Presses" (2008); and "Earth, Wind & Fire @ Your Library: Changing Climate and Changing Lives" (co-sponsored by TFOE and International Responsibilities Task Force) (2008) (American Library, 2008a).

The first green pre-conference took place in 2000. ALA hosted a pre-conference titled *Libraries Build Sustainable Communities.* The program was funded through a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Global Learning of New Jersey. The objective of the pre-conference was "to envision how local libraries can tailor services to meet community priorities in the twenty-first century" (Raymer, 2001, p. 17). Librarians considered ways communities could be taught to view libraries as places for public discussion, and an information resource in community decision making. Attending librarians were trained to conduct a workshop that could be replicated at state or regional conferences (Raymer, 2001). The Libraries Build Sustainable Communities website was maintained by the ALA Governance Office from November 22, 1999 to August 31, 2001. It currently resides on the Task Force on the Environment website (American Library, 2001).

The ALA in a September 30, 2008 press release stated that it will be promoting the 2009 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago as a green conference (American Library, 2008b). The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the ALA proclaimed its 2007 national conference was "going green." One of AASL's major concerns was the amount of paper wasted on unused handouts. At the conference in Reno, Nevada all of the handouts and supporting materials were made available electronically to attendees (American Library, 2007). In May 2008, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offered a live chat to discuss Green Libraries through their ACRL OnPoint series. ACRL described the event as an opportunity for professional colleagues and field experts to discuss what libraries are, or could be doing to meet the growing need for "greening" of college and university campuses. Mary Carr, Dean Instructional Services, Spokane Community College and Dr. Debra Rowe, President of the U.S. Partnership for a Sustainable Future were the program's conveners (ACRL OnPoint, 2008). Dr. Rowe started the program by talking about the Brutland definition of sustainability, which she described as "meeting the needs of the present in such a way that future generations can meet their own needs" (ACRL OnPoint, 2008, time 10:03). The librarians attending the session shared green activities that were happening on their campuses, such as having their schools join the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment to develop a green campus. Another participant mentioned that her university had adopted a no-Styrofoam rule (ACRL OnPoint, 2008, time 10:16). Dr. Rowe encouraged participants to visit the [Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education](#) (AASHE). Founded in 2006, AASHE describes itself as is an association of colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada with a "mission to promote sustainability in all sectors of higher education - from governance and operations to curriculum and outreach - through education, communication, research and professional development" (AASHE, 2008, para. 1).

At the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2008 the "Cup by Cup for a Greener ALA" campaign was spearheaded by the Task Force on the Environment. The campaign encouraged librarians attending the meeting in Philadelphia to bring travel mugs and water bottles. The campaign estimated that over 10,000 paper or Styrofoam cups could be kept out of landfills if the approximately 10,000 librarians attending Midwinter brought their own travel mugs (Antonelli, Stoss, & Harger, 2008). Special Libraries Association (SLA) announced in January 2008 that it would "take the first steps and begin efforts to become an environmentally sensitive organization at the membership, board, volunteer leadership, and staff level" (Special Libraries, 2008, para.1). Soon afterwards, the group created the "SLA: Knowledge to Go Green" initiative implemented at the June 2008 Conference. At the SLA Conference sessions were presented on a variety of environmental issues such as renewable resources, sustainability, and corporate accountability. In an effort to reduce waste, SLA purchased 3,000 reusable water bottles that were handed out to attendees. In addition, the conference tote bags were made from 65% recycled materials (Davis, 2008). The SLA Environment & Resources Management Division encouraged attendees to use public transit as much as possible at the conference, share hotel rooms with a roommate to conserve energy use and purchase carbon offsets to help reduce carbon created in the atmosphere by travel (Eastman, Keiser, & Weaver, 2008). The ACRL Green Conference Committee is committed to reducing the environmental impact of the 2009 National Conference in Seattle, Washington. Conference attendees will be asked to take the ACRL Green Pledge and

commit to reducing the meeting's ecological footprint. To help librarians select a green hotel, ACRL created an official list of hotel eco-friendly practices (Association of College, 2008).

The Next Green Step

In his paper "The Future of Libraries: Beginning the Great Transformation," Thomas Frey, Executive Director of the DaVinci Institute, discusses how "libraries will transition from a center of information to a center of culture" (Frey, 2007, Trend #10). Frey goes on to state "a culture-based library is one that taps into the spirit of the community, assessing priorities and providing resources to support the things deemed most important" (Frey, 2007, Trend #10, para. 3).

Economic instability, energy depletion, and planetary degradation are transforming society, and in turn transforming libraries. James Kunstler, author of the *Long Emergency* believes that "a powerful combination of depleted oil fields, climate change, population growth and financial crisis soon will conspire to change the American lifestyle drastically" (Aued, 2008, para. 2). These wide-reaching changes may push public libraries to offer new and unusual green programs to their communities. In March 2008, *Library Journal* published the article "After Oil: Public Libraries will Have an Important Role to Play in our Post-Peak-Oil Society" (Stone, 2008). Stone describes her belief that public libraries will be havens for community members in a time of declining oil supplies. Because of this looming crisis, she claims that library services and resources will be even more important, and that librarians will need to provide information about growing food and alternative medicines. She states that librarians should be creating partnerships with hospitals, community centers, and citizens to help create socially sustainable communities in the face of declining oil supplies.

Food security is one of the most significant recurring themes in peak oil literature. Because of food security issues libraries may, like Norway's Svalbard Global Seed Vault, need to become archival depositories for genetic material like seeds. Some libraries are starting to serve as depository for local seeds. Clark County Public Library director, Julie Maruskin, has been growing and saving heirloom seeds for her library for over eight years. Her husband, John Maruskin, says it is not uncommon for someone to come up to the circulation desk and ask for heirloom bean and tomato seeds (Maruskin, 2008). Director Maruskin is working to be a link between agricultural resources and her community by offering traveling workshops to aspiring heirloom gardeners. In 2005, the library offered 20 gardening classes in 11 Kentucky counties which drew 573 attendees. In 2006, the library received a Library Services and Technology Act grant to expand the program to libraries in 25 Kentucky counties (Stewart, 2006).

In April 2008, the New York Sun reported that parts of the United States were facing food rationing. Food retailers in New York, parts of New England and the West Coast were limiting the amount of flour, rice and cooking oil that people could purchase (Gerstein, 2008). One way to deal with food insecurity is to grow your own food. Some public libraries are doing just that by creating community gardens to educate patrons about successful gardening practices and local food issues. Others are using their gardens to grow both food and community participation.

In 2008 a community garden was created at the Richmond Main Library in Richmond, California. Numerous people helped to plant and tend the garden including librarians, city employees, community volunteers, seniors, and library patrons (Treadway, 2008). The community garden's purpose at Wayne County Public Library in Goldsboro, North Carolina was to create community. The garden was started with contributions from the Friends of the Library and with the help of the Parks and Recreation Department. Library Director Jane Rustin at first questioned what a community garden had to do with the library, but gave Children's Librarian Shorlette Ammons-Stephens permission to go ahead with her plan. Ammons-Stephens' successful efforts were recognized when the Library received a $3,000 grant from ALA's Public Programs Office for demonstrating how the Library's garden created community for local teens (Edwards, 2008). Another example of a current post-peak-oil type library service is a tool lending library. Currently there are 22 tool lending libraries in the United States. The Berkley Public Library's Tool Lending

Library was the first, beginning in 1979. The Library offers Berkley residents and property owners over 2,500 different tools to use for free. Patrons can borrow anything from a cement mixer to a utility knife, from a lawn mower to a garden hoe and everything in between (Berkley Public, 2008).

College and university libraries may soon be able to tap into grant money to create sustainability programs on their campuses. On August 14, 2008 President George W. Bush, signed into law the Higher Education Sustainability Act (HESA) as part of the new Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. The HESA Act creates a ground-breaking "University Sustainability Grants Program" which offers competitive grants to institutions of higher education to develop and implement sustainability curricula, practices, and academic programs. The program falls under the administration of the Department of Education (Campus ERC, 2008).

Another green step for librarians at institutions of higher learning is to encourage their presidents and chancellors to sign the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment. Colleges and universities are a $315 billion sector of the U.S. economy. Green initiates at colleges and universities have the potential of generating far-reaching societal changes (Butenweiser, 2008, p. 34). Over 500 U.S. college and university presidents have committed to reducing and eliminating global-warming emissions from their campuses (Ameresco, 2008).

A Call to Action

The majority of scientists around the world now agree that the planet is under stress. The Nobel Prize winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded in their report that "global warming is 'unequivocal' and that human activity is 'very likely' causing most of [the] rise in temperatures" (Rosenthal & Revkin, 2007, para. 1). This means people and institutions will need to change their behaviors so they can begin repairing the planet. If in the coming years Kunstler's predictions are accurate, we may be entering a world where people "will be forced to give up cars, tractors and airplanes in favor of trains and pack animals, trade in Wal-Mart for backyard gardens and abandon their high-rise condos and suburban McMansions for small towns and family farms" (Aued, 2008, para. 5).

The time is right for librarians to step up and help communities become green and sustainable. "Limits to Growth," author and sustainability expert Professor Donella Meadows listed the public library as one of the "seven-plus wonders of sustainability" (Meadows, 1999, para. 7). The role of the library is to serve its community. Communities need libraries and librarians to act as role models for sustainability by providing accurate information on all manner of green topics, from alternative building practices to renewable energy options. The time is also right for librarians to support and continue to grow the Green Library Movement.

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