



*The International Association of
Conservative / Masorti Rabbis,
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Rabbinical Assembly Position Paper on the Environment June 2009

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Involved with COEJL since its inception, in the past two decades, the Rabbinical Assembly has passed no fewer than 15 resolutions on environmental issues ranging from the Endangered Species Act to decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels, to global warming to environmental issues in Israel.

In 1997, the Rabbinical Assembly produced a High Holiday packet on the environment with COEJL. It contains sample sermons by Gordon Tucker and Larry Troster, text teaching by Larry Troster, policy material, resources for study and action, and an article entitled, "Learning to Live with Less" by Chancellor Ismar Schorsch.

As far back as 1991, the Rabbinical Assembly called for:

- Growing, producing and manufacturing food and food products in a way that protects the earth.
- Use consumables such as paper products, cleaning materials, etc that are both recycled and recyclable.
- Invest in companies that practice environmentally friendly practices

In papers submitted to the Republican and Democratic National Committees in 1992, the RA called for our leaders to enact legislation promoting energy efficiency, reduction of waste, recycling and other practices that promote environmental sustainability. It also called for local communities to convene business and governmental leaders to implement these practices.

In 1994 and again in 2007, the Rabbinical Assembly called for its congregations to recycle and to reduce waste in both its institutions and homes of members. It also called for our institutions to conduct environmental audits and to integrate Jewish environmental education into the educational curriculum and to reduce waste as *smahot* since often food is simply thrown away.

In 2007, the resolution posited the following specific program:

- Energy audits of the facilities the institutions occupy;
- Purchase of energy from sustainable sources;
- Implementation of reduction of waste through recycling and limiting the use of disposables;
- Use of non-toxic cleaning, lawn, and garden care products;

- Educational programs in the community teaching the Jewish sources of environmentalism and encouraging members of their community to green their own homes; and
- Encouragement of their constituents to reduce energy use by driving high mileage vehicles, using public transportation and carpooling;

At various times, the RA has called on the U.S. government and the government of other nations to oppose legislation that would undermine laws that safeguard the country's environment (1995); endanger the diversity of our species in the environment (1996), and to enact legislation to promote global environmental health such as passage of clean air standards, reducing toxic waste, regulate hazardous materials, and testing of products before they are brought to market for their compliances with environmental regulations, etc. (1997, 1999, 2003, 2007); to promote environmental reforms and global development that would help the citizens of the world to live within the bounds of the capacities of the earth (1997).

The Rabbinical Assembly has passed several resolutions on the issue of Global Warming (1998, 1999, and 2003).

In 2000, the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution calling for the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for several reasons including the impact of nuclear arms on global warming and the global environment.

The Rabbinical Assembly has also called upon the U.S. government to support strong emissions and CAFÉ standards (most recently in 2008) with respect to fuel efficiency.

In 2008, the Rabbinical Assembly called on the institutions of the Conservative Movement to sign onto a Green Covenant calling on, among other things, to reduce our carbon footprint and to call on the government of our countries to reduce carbon emissions by 50%; to promote the Solar *Ner Tamid*; to support legislation at the local and federal levels on CAFÉ standards and the use of renewable resources; improving public transportation to our own institutions and to our local areas; and to encourage investment policies to enhance a socially responsible portfolio.

Most recently (May 11-12, 2009), the RA participated in the first ever Sustainability Conference sponsored by the Jewish community. Hosted by COEJL, Jewish groups from across the spectrum who run buildings participated in this conference. The Conservative Movement (represented by various arms) presented a well-thought out and comprehensive plan for sustainability in our institutions.

A common theme through many of our resolutions has been supporting the development of a comprehensive national energy policy as a matter of national security. A policy that increases United States energy independence by reducing dependence upon fossil fuels, particularly oil from the Middle East, through energy efficiency and the development of environmentally clean, affordable alternative energy sources and technologies. This should include significant increases in vehicle fuel economy standards, research and development of energy efficient automobiles and the building and increased use of energy efficient mass transit.