



Three Tiers of Environmental Sustainability for ISKCON

Prepared by the ISKCON Environmental Initiative

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Introduction

As explained in the document “The Ecotheology of Our Tradition,” care for the Earth and Krishna consciousness go naturally together. Lord Krishna explains in the *Bhagavad-gita* that He is the proprietor and enjoyer of the entire creation. Thus, it’s important for ISKCON devotees to protect and care for the Earth and all her creatures, knowing well, as the *Sri Isopanishad* explains, “to whom they belong.”

Yet, just as we tend to forget the Lord’s supreme position, we sometimes forget to care for His property—His energies. Some devotees may think we don’t need to worry about “material things.” Or, we may think that being vegetarian is enough of a contribution towards protecting the Earth and other species, and no other actions should be required of us.

However, the very concept of Krishna consciousness means to be conscious of the Lord and His energies *in all that we do*. Just as we are conscious of what we eat or don’t eat, we should be conscious of how we purchase, prepare, and store the food, or *bhoga*, that we offer to the Lord. We need to be conscious, or Krishna conscious, in how we conserve the water He has gifted us. We need to be conscious in treating waste products so as to replenish, and not harm, our surroundings. We also need to be conscious to minimize the energies we use, remembering *whose energies* we are consuming. Srila Prabhupada set the example for us – by walking out of his way to turn off water faucets, instructing disciples to turn off unnecessary lights and fans, etc.

All around us, exploitation of the Earth is having drastic and harmful effects. Air pollution in many cities, including New Delhi, regularly measures “hazardous” for days and weeks on end. Climate change and global warming have contributed to historically destructive wildfires in Australia and North America. Polar ice caps are melting. Hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, tsunamis, and other natural disasters are more frequent and more intense across the globe. Some island nations and coastal regions face submersion in the rising oceans. Without significant change, young people today will face drastic impact in the quality of their lives.

“Simple living and high thinking,” a profound form of sustainability, has always been part of Krishna conscious philosophy. In recent years “sustainability” has become a guiding principle for many individuals and governments. As servants of Lord Krishna, it’s important that we act in alignment with our principles of caring about the Lord’s property. Furthermore, for our Krishna consciousness message to be taken seriously we must act with integrity. As ISKCON members we are called to teach and preach, but we must also be examples of living conscious, caring lives while offering our hearts to the Lord in a holistic way.

To assist ISKCON devotees and communities in protecting the Earth, the ISKCON Environmental Initiative (IEI) has created guidelines for eco-friendly practices “The Three Tiers of Environmental Sustainability.” These Three Tiers of recommendations were developed with the input of leading ISKCON devotees worldwide, many of whom are champions of “simple living and high thinking.”¹

The Tiers are guidelines and not mandates. They highlight important steps we can all take in five areas: Food, Energy, Waste Management, Water, and Education, Outreach and Culture. We urge ISKCON temples, communities and where applicable, individuals, to implement the Tiers as practical steps to achieve progressive levels of Krishna Conscious Environmentalism. In the future, we will be developing “Green Temple Awards” to recognize those communities that have achieved significant results in implementing the guidelines and caring for the Earth.

For some communities, Tier One will be the goal to be achieved over one or two years of concentrated effort. Other communities will have many Tier One standards in place, and we recommend they strive to achieve Tier Two, or as much of Tier Two as they can reasonably accomplish. Tier Three demonstrates a high level of eco-sustainability that, while feasible for many rural communities, may not be possible for most urban temples. Yet, we urge all our communities to gradually work towards Tier Three and to implement as many of its standards as possible.

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The Three Tiers of Environmental Sustainability for ISKCON Temples

Temples are encouraged to start with Tier 1 efforts. Once these are achieved, temples can begin working towards Tier 2 and Tier 3. Each category is headed by its primary aim in bold, followed by strategies to achieve those aims. Alternative and creative methods are welcome.

	FOOD	ENERGY	WASTE MGMT	WATER	EDUCATION, OUTREACH, CULTURE
TIER 1	<p><i>ISKCON's environmental ethics begin with a firm commitment to vegetarianism. Abstaining from meat, fish, and eggs, we believe, is an essential step towards sustainable and conscious living.</i></p>				
	<p>Food waste reduction; plan for efficiency</p> <p>Efficient use of food via smart purchasing, inventory control, & storage</p> <p>Prioritize buying local, organic, non-GMO foods</p> <p>Distribute 'left over' food according to local health guidelines to the needy</p> <p>Distribute raw food waste to animals according to health guidelines</p> <p>Compost other food waste instead of entering landfill</p>	<p>Minimize energy consumption; plan for efficiency</p> <p>Perform energy audit of existing buildings with help of local agencies</p> <p>Switch to CFL or LED lights, put lights and machines on timers or motion sensors, or turn off when not in use</p> <p>Install smart thermostats</p> <p>Minimize dryer use; utilize wind and sunlight</p> <p>Promote fuel-free transportation such as walking and biking</p> <p>Use public transportation whenever feasible; carpool; combine shopping trips</p>	<p>Responsibly reduce, reuse, and recycle</p> <p>Develop a waste management plan</p> <p>Purchase only compostable (at least biodegradable) plates, cups, cutlery, etc.</p> <p>Where possible, segregate compostable (biodegradable) waste and work with onsite/offsite composting</p> <p>Where possible, segregate and process recyclables</p> <p>Minimize use of non-recyclables especially plastic bags, bottles, and Styrofoam.</p>	<p>Minimize water usage; plan for efficiency</p> <p>Reduce use of water in kitchen, bathroom and landscaping</p> <p>Install water efficient faucets, faucet adapters, toilets, urinals, and washing machines</p> <p>Use only eco-friendly cleaning, landscaping and gardening products</p>	<p>Teach about "a simpler, more natural way of life" -- ISKCON's sixth purpose</p> <p>Identify a Local Green Team Coordinator for your temple/community</p> <p>Put signage around the temple pointing to sustainability efforts</p> <p>Regularly teach how Srila Prabhupada's formula of "simple living and high thinking" aligns with environmental sustainability</p> <p>Promote awareness of the Vaishnava principle that the Earth is the Lord's sacred energy and should be treated with respect and care</p>

TIER 2	<i>Use local and non-GMO/ organic food</i>	<i>Replace equipment with energy- efficient alternatives</i>	<i>Expand waste management efforts to the community</i>	<i>Transition to water-efficient alternatives</i>	<i>Expand education efforts to the community</i>
	Grow vegetables and flowers in temple garden Buy produce from local farmers Prioritize use of seasonal, local, organic, non-GMO food in temple kitchen	Choose <i>Energy Star</i> -certified appliances including water heaters, washing machines, etc. Switch to smart energy metering Purchase only hybrid or electric vehicles Improve efficiency of all buildings with double or triple pane windows, shading, insulation, etc.	Encourage devotees to use their own plates, water bottles, and containers at the temple Compost all food waste for organic garden; or sell compost to local community Purchase food in bulk or with minimum packaging	Install waterless urinals Use timers for water faucets and sprinklers Landscape using water efficient plants and local flora Create swales to capture runoff, especially around paved areas	Integrate temple sustainability initiatives with congregational programs Network with local environmental organizations Arrange systematic environmental training for children and adults Create projects involving children, such as a children's garden
TIER 3	<i>Advanced dedication to sustainable food</i>	<i>Advanced dedication to sustainable energy</i>	<i>Advanced dedication to materials efficiency</i>	<i>Advanced dedication to sustainable water use</i>	<i>Advanced dedication to sustainability education</i>
	Use milk only from temple cows or other protected cows Encourage devotees to grow food at home for home usage and for offering to the Lord	Install solar panels or change to a renewable provider Maintain energy efficiency of existing buildings through upgrades and <i>Energy Star</i> or other certification Plan for energy efficiency, and LEED certification where applicable, in the construction of all new buildings	Exclusive use of steel plates or banana leaves for serving food Use methane gas digesters to generate bioenergy from organic food waste	Employ rain water harvesting where permissible Install systems for grey water reuse Use groundwater for non-potable usage, where permissible	Collaborate with local colleges, universities and government agencies to develop demonstration projects