

# **“Kilowatt Ours”: How I Feel About the Current State of Our Environment**

**Janel Allen  
Coral Reef Senior High**

I have always heard stories of people who have been impacted by a significant event or new idea, but I have never truly experienced this until I watched the documentary “Kilowatt Ours”. Before watching the documentary, I thought it would be about the same old “go green” slogan and already widely known energy saving ideas. But, sitting down to watch this documentary with my parents, I was definitely surprised at how much it really impacted me. I was astonished to learn that there were so many things that I had not previously known. This led me to figure that that is probably the same mindset a lot of people have. They feel that they are certified environmentalists by watching commercials about hybrid cars, or hearing presidential candidates debate on the issue of global warming, just as I had. But there is so much more to it, an exponential amount more. By watching “Kilowatt Ours” I have been introduced to this whole new world, or as I should say a whole new environment of problems and solutions I had never even heard of, or much less imagined. This documentary truly takes you to a place of beneficial thought. I don’t care who you are or what your background is, “Kilowatt Ours” will definitely get you pondering upon the simple things you can do to make a difference.

Consequently, I feel that everyone should have the opportunity to view this documentary. There are so many things that we can do no matter how small to improve the state of our already nearly destroyed environment. I would truly recommend “Kilowatt Ours” to anyone of any age as I am sure it will draw them in, reveal some disturbing truths, but encourage them to start doing something. I have seen a lot of documentaries in my time, and this one was probably the most innovative and engaging one I have seen in a long time. Some people would rather watch something more

“interesting” with more drama, but the complete destruction of our environment is drama enough for me!

“Kilowatt Ours” starts off with an introduction to mountain top removal that is taking place nearly everyday. To tell you the truth, I had honestly never heard of such a thing and was utterly surprised that it was going on. With further research I discovered

Mountaintop removal mining is a form of strip mining in which coal companies use explosives to blast as much as 800 to 1000 feet off the tops of mountains order to reach the coal seams that lie underneath. The resulting millions of tons of waste rock, dirt, and vegetation are then dumped into surrounding valleys, burying miles and miles of streams under piles of rubble hundreds of feet deep. Mountaintop removal mining harms not only aquatic ecosystems and water quality, but also destroys hundreds of acres of healthy forests and fish and wildlife habitat, including habitat of threatened and endangered species, when the tops of mountains are blasted away. ([www.stopmountaintopremoval.org](http://www.stopmountaintopremoval.org))

I cannot believe that this is actually going on and causing unnatural floods, such as the one that took place in Dorothy, West Virginia just a few years ago that devastated the community. It is disappointing that they risk these disasters just for the gain of coal which we already use too much of.

In the segment where normal people like me and you were asked if they knew where most of their electricity is from, I realized that I, too, had no idea. I thought long and hard about it and discovered that I was clueless as to where the electricity I use every day came from. I was astonished to learn that one kilowatt hour is equivalent to one

pound of coal, and that Americans consume 1.1 billion tons of coal per year. It is troubling to hear that this use of coal and their power plants that process it emit unimaginable amounts of carbon dioxide that also contributes to global warming. This vicious cycle of burning coal and fossil fuels has led to an increased warming of our environment. Due to this unwanted phenomenon, there has been an increase in mosquitoes which can potentially carry infectious disease, the destruction of coral reefs, increase in hurricanes and heat and the disappearance of the spruce first population.

The documentary then went on to talk about the use of nuclear power that produces harmful radioactive waste. To my surprise the segment on radioactive waste scared me the most, because the man they interviewed talked of the fact that most of the people he had worked with had fallen victim to cancer.

The next part of “Kilowatt Ours” was something I could definitely relate to. They talked about haze pollution in the Great Smokey Mountains, which I have personally witnessed. I found out that haze pollution is affecting several parts of the country and is harming the wilderness which it engulfs. It is one of the most basic forms of air pollution that

degrades visibility in many American cities and scenic areas. Haze is caused when sunlight encounters tiny pollution particles in the air, which reduce the clarity and color of what we see, and particularly during humid conditions. Since 1988 the federal government has been monitoring visibility in national parks and wilderness areas... [and] in 1999, EPA announced a major effort to improve air quality in national parks and wilderness areas. ([www.epa.gov/oar/vis/](http://www.epa.gov/oar/vis/))

With sulfate contributing to both air pollution and ground level ozone pollution, I can recall not being able to see much from the top of the mountains, and it was worrying to discover that this was caused by pollution. Even more disturbing, was the discovery of mercury in the fish that we eat, that is harmful to us as we consume it and especially to pregnant women and their unborn children.

In a change of feeling, the segments on the things we could do to make changes were inspiring. Learning about compact fluorescent lights, sky lighting, LED lights, recycling, and even just turning off computers when we are finished with them, especially in schools, can make a big difference to the health of the environment. Furthermore, the miraculous story of how California avoided building numerous power plants in 2000 was a relatable story that was evidence that it was possible to help our environment and make a difference.

When the documentary introduced me to the different types of green power I was interested to learn that there was a variety of energy sources that help protect our environment. The onset of wind, solar, biogas, net zero, and even the fact that you can purchase blocks of green power was enlightening. Through research, I found out the small yet beneficial steps Indiana is taking to make a difference and the fact that

Consumer interest in “green power” - electricity generated from renewable sources such as wind, landfills, the sun, and hydroelectric generation facilities - continues to grow in Indiana and throughout the nation. In Indiana, the electric utility industry is pursuing a variety of green power initiatives, including the development of renewable generation facilities, agreements to purchase renewable energy on the wholesale electric

market, and green power billing options for customers.

([www.in.gov/oucc/2512.htm](http://www.in.gov/oucc/2512.htm))

When it came to the options for alternative energy, I feel that the United States should pursue biogas technology. I feel that this would be efficient because cow manure is an endless source of biogas and putting it through a manure digester that can convert it to energy would be an appropriate way to relieve some of the environmental problems we face today. These infinite amounts of cow waste allows for an efficient production of energy.

[these] anaerobic digesters can help control the disposal and odor of animal waste has stimulated renewed interest in the technology. It is often the environmental reasons ... that motivate farmers to use digester technology...Anaerobic digester systems can reduce fecal coliform bacteria in manure by more than 99 percent, virtually eliminating a major source of water pollution.

([www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/RENEW/Biomass/biogas.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/RENEW/Biomass/biogas.shtml))

To my surprise I had never heard of this type of alternative energy source, and it interested me the most. I feel it would be completely efficient for the United States to initiate.

Conclusively, I feel that there a lot of simple steps that we can take to make a difference in the environment and I am overjoyed that I had the chance to view “Kilowatt Ours” to get my mind and body moving into action to protect it. I have already started looking into the Energy Star program and products to see what I can buy that will help

ease up on some of the endless energy use that takes place in the United States. I was amazed to learn that

... [it] is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy helping us all save money and protect the environment through energy efficient products and practices... [and that] results are already adding up [as] Americans, with the help of Energy Star, [have] saved enough energy in 2007 alone to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 27 million cars all while saving \$16 billion on their utility bills. (<http://www.energystar.gov/>)

Overall, “Kilowatt Ours” was a documentary that could not have been made at a more appropriate time. Our environment is literally crumbling under our feet, and we need to start now to make changes. It is never too late to start and now is the perfect time to do it. Since watching the documentary, I have realized that even I have started doing things I have never done before, like simply turn off lights when I am not in the room, or convince my parents to turn up the thermostat on air conditioning to reduce energy loss. I would love the chance to say that I have helped reduce coal usage and this documentary has helped me find out the ways that I can effectively do this. I would encourage anyone, but especially my peers who are the future, to watch this documentary and start making changes.

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