



Irony meets innovation: Earth Day in Second Life

by Sage Truss, Correspondent



Sage Truss is a real-life VP of Technology committed to a sustainable future through her nonprofit work. A techno-shaman, writer, and photographer, she has the goal of “making all worlds better places to live, love, and learn.”

On April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day prompted millions of Americans to voice their concern for the degrading state of the environment and to demonstrate across the country for a sustainable planet. This powerful mobilization led to the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the federal Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species acts. According to Wikipedia (although the day continued to be celebrated year after year), it was not until twenty years later in 1990 that Earth Day went global, with people in 141 countries working together to call attention to environmental issues—most prominently, recycling.

By the year 2000, the Internet had helped to grow an even larger network of participants, and electronic activism continues to broaden the outreach of the event and its focus on planetary sustainability. This brings us to today, when we now have technologies that not only keep us linked to each other in real time and provide access to a seemingly infinite number of information sources, but which also allow us to render and share virtual environments in which to play and collaborate.

Still, anyone would ponder the irony of celebrating Earth Day in a world composed of pixels, housed in networked servers with the closest things resembling nature appearing on textured objects in a cartoon-like world. Yet, that’s

exactly what several organizations in Second Life will be doing during the week of this international day of Earth action. One of these will be the Avatar Action Center (AAC), a project of the Tides Center, which will be holding its second annual Earth Day event on Saturday, April 19th.

Earth Day in Second Life is being coordinated with the real-life Tides Center in San Francisco, California.

Featuring live music performances, educational presentations, games and tours, the AAC expects to both entertain and bring messages of Earth responsibility and action to more than 1,000 visitors across two locations. Starting at 8AM PST, event attendees will be able to learn about numerous sustainability

Avatar
Action*

issues, including solar energy, electric vehicles, peak oil, climate change, and greening businesses while also being treated to some of Second Life's most popular musical talents.

AAC is collaborating with other SL-based groups for the event, including Etopia and OneClimate, as part of a network of organizations utilizing the unique immersive environment to raise awareness about sustainable living and environmental issues. In addition, AAC is working with organizations in the "real world" as part of their mission to get people to take action outside of their virtual lives. The Sustainable Living Roadshow, a talented group of real-world activist/performers, will be lending its concept of a carnival caravan, including educational games, shows, and exhibits all facilitated by volunteers at AAC who help to convert 2D photographic content and information into interactive 3D models for avatars to experience.

Environmenta artists from GreenMuseum.org are also being invited to exhibit their work at AAC, as are the filmmakers behind "The Age of Stupid," an upcoming documentary-style film depicting a future where interviewees of a world becoming ever more decimated by global warming comment on how the world used to be prior to extreme climate changes.

If you find yourself now dwelling on the hypocrisy of using all the energy required to maintain these virtual spaces dedicated to raising awareness about sustainability, be at least a little comforted knowing that AAC offsets its carbon footprint in SL through a program provided by the Green Islands project, which facilitates the purchase of enough carbon credits to offset the power consumed in a year by an entire sim. Even AAC's web site is powered by wind energy!

For those interested in helping out, but do not have the skills to create virtual content, AAC can use the following: marketers to get the word out; greeters to direct people to event and activity areas; tour guides to show visitors the numerous ongoing educational installations and programs of AAC; performer/presenter support people to help with stream and object setups as performers arrive during the day, and; security guards to make sure griefters and other intruders do not disrupt the festivities. Of course, the AAC as a volunteer-run nonprofit organization, always welcomes the talents of builders, texturers, and coders who would like to apply their skills to make a difference.

All who would like to learn more about Earth Day in Second Life or who wish to volunteer to help in any capacity can contact Sage Truss in-world or via email—or, just drop by the AAC, Etopia, or OneClimate to pick up a schedule of events. In all, it promises to be a day of innovative learning and fun! ☼



Celebrate Earth Day in Second Life at the Avatar Action Center April 19th, 2008, from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Enjoy music, games, presentations, and tours at SL's most active sustainability organizations: Avatar Action Center, Etopia Eco-Village, and OneClimate.



"Solar Home 101" class being held at Avatar Action Center's 2007 Earth Day event using a working interactive solar house model on permanent display at AAC.



"Toss Out Fossil Fuels" is one of the real-world carnival games (left) from the Sustainable Living Roadshow that the Avatar Action Center is converting for use during their Earth Day event in Second Life (right).