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# Divorce: The Second-Hand Smoke of Climate Change?

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*“A divorce may cause more carbon dioxide emissions than an additional birth” ~UN State of the World Population report, 2009*

It's that bad. When your neighbors get divorced, the planet shudders. And your children (and theirs) will feel the heat of that choice.

Earth Day (April 22<sup>nd</sup> this year) reminds us to reflect on what's working and what's not when it comes to sustainable planetary and human health. Divorce is definitely not working. Like secondhand smoke from cigarettes, the impacts of divorce now weigh on the health and well-being of others. And just as we as a society once had no clue that secondhand smoke is dangerous, we are only now beginning to recognize the risks of divorce, let alone address them.

Besides a burgeoning litany of other divorce-related risks, in just the last handful of years science has also shown us that divorce has a disproportionate impact on Earth's finite resources when compared to marriage.

In 2007 the preeminent *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* published a study by Eunice Yu and Jiango Liu titled Environmental Impacts of Divorce. This pioneering research showed that worldwide, divorce inflates resource use because divorced people typically live in similar sized homes with fewer people while sustaining similar resource use levels (per person) as those living together in intact families.

In other words, divorce leads to more households per the same number of people, far more resource use (and expense) per person, and, thus, more climate-choking emissions.

**Divorce causes efficiency to plummet.**

For example, in 2005 alone (according to the [PNAS study](#)), *“In the United States, divorced households spent 46% and 56% more on electricity and water per person than married households. Divorced households in the U.S. could have saved more than 38 million rooms, 73 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity, and 627 billion gallons of water... if their resource-use efficiency had been comparable to married households. Furthermore, U.S. households that experienced divorce used 42–61% more resources per person than before their dissolution.”*

It’s slam-dunk simple logic. In an accompanying story at [ABCNEWS.com](#), Liu, the co-author of the study said, **“Whether you have four or two people, you still use the same amount of heat, and whether you have two people or 10 people, the light is on.”**

Then, two years later in 2009, the United Nations published their [State of the World Population](#) report. Owen Mears spotlighted the report in [Divorce has negative impact on the environment](#). He writes that the UN report addressed that, “The need for two houses and two cars, for example, means the consumption of household energies is at least doubled.”

Likewise, Liu, co-author of the [PNAS study](#) told [ABCNEWS.com](#) that **“[Couples] don't know the impact on environment from divorce... After the research is done, it's really simple. Before our research, nobody knew about the impact... My hope is that they will think about the decision. Also, they can inform other people about the environmental impact of divorce.”**

### **What do you think? Would you reconsider a divorce?**

Will this sort of information inspire couples to change their minds, perhaps even to seek out the tools and research we now have that will help them heal their marriage and create a thriving, joyous partnership? Will they be inspired to help reduce their impact on the planet for their own and other children’s sake? Will more married couples reach out to struggling or divorcing friends, and help them with support, information, and resources?

Raoul Felder, a “prominent New York divorce attorney,” doesn’t think so. The [ABCNEWS.com](#) story quotes him as saying, “I think people who want a divorce are so driven to improve their quality of life—environmental factors are the least of what they're thinking about... If they're not thinking about the effect of divorce on children, they're not going to be thinking what their environmental footprint is going to be or how many kilowatts they're using.”

But I disagree. Had my husband and I understood the risks of divorce, as well as the [tools and research](#) coming from [attachment science](#) that help couples uncover and restore their primal love bond to emotional vibrancy, we would most likely have skipped [our divorce](#) altogether. We are one of the many hundreds of thousands of couples who fell into the so-called divorce trap because [we didn’t have all the information](#).

And now we do. Which is why the [Coalition for Divorce Reform](#) and [Kids Against Divorce](#) are so important. These organizations’ missions are to broadcast and disseminate information about the risks of divorce, as well the tools available for struggling couples, to as many people as possible: *with the urgent, necessary goal of serious social change.*

And also **to give a crucial voice to the millions of children of divorce.**

Because here’s the thing: If divorce *is* the second-hand smoke of climate change then we and our children *need* the whistle-blowers. Just like the folks who uncovered the dangers of

cigarettes and then bravely told the truth in a social climate averse to their findings, today's whistleblowers for the risks of divorce need our thanks and support.

Which brings me back to Earth Day.

Thanks to David Schel at [Kids Against Divorce](#) we can do something proactive to help. Schel — a father and survivor of an unwanted divorce — teamed up with Pamela Hart of [Plant trees 4 Life](#) to make a living grove of trees as a monument to all the millions of children of divorce. Schel's remarkable "[broken family tree](#)" shows the devastating impact divorce can have across generations; so he



decided to plant healthy, living trees as a testament and beacon of hope for children of divorce. What's more, for every tree planted Plant Trees 4 Life will make a donation to Kids Against Divorce, thereby helping KAD serve its much-needed mission.

Best of all, this Earth Day, planting "Family Trees" takes on even more significance with the knowledge that by **planting these trees we can also offset the carbon footprint left in the wake of so many divorces.**

Won't you join me in planting a million trees and offsetting the impact of divorce? Visit KAD's "[Plant One Million Trees](#)" to help plant a million trees this Earth Day, 2012.

**And, for the sake of Earth and all her children, please spread the word!**

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