

Frequently Asked Questions

What inspired Avery Hairston to start RelightNY?

After sitting in on Al Gore's global warming presentation, which would later develop into the movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, Avery Hairston was inspired to come up with a way to fight global warming. He came upon a Starbucks ad while reading *The New York Times*. It stated that if everyone who received the paper changed just one incandescent bulb to a CFL, the reduction in carbon emissions would be the same as if approximately 89,000 cars were taken off the road. Having already been inspired by Gore's presentation on global warming, Avery had the idea to start with something simple like light bulbs, and RelightNY was born.

What does RelightNY hope to accomplish?

Our first goal is to raise awareness of environmental issues and, subsequently, to get more people of all ages involved in fighting climate change, especially younger people. We also hope to teach people how to make small changes in their lives to counteract climate change.

Our second goal is to initiate change in the present, both by reducing carbon emissions to help combat global warming and by doing our part to help people in low-income housing reduce their energy bills.

RelightNY will create a movement of young people eager to make a difference in their community and in their world. The light bulbs are just the beginning.

How does RelightNY operate?

RelightNY buys the CFL bulbs using funds obtained through corporate sponsorship. Open Space Institute handles fiscal responsibilities. The bulbs are distributed by HELP USA at their housing facilities. In addition, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) serves as adviser to RelightNY.

What are the benefits of RelightNY?

RelightNY has four major benefits that we like to call the four Es:

- 1. ENVIRONMENT:** Switching to CFL bulbs reduces the amount of energy we use and the carbon emissions we produce.
- 2. EDUCATION:** Through distribution of CFL bulbs to low-income families, awareness of environmental issues spreads and more people understand the benefits of using less energy.
- 3. ECONOMY:** CFL bulbs last up to 10 times longer than standard light bulbs and reduce electricity costs.
- 4. EMPOWERMENT:** Everyone can feel proud that they're contributing to the fight against global warming!

Why do young people care about the environment?

Global warming, whether we like it or not, will be our generation's problem to solve. We feel compelled to start helping now, before it's too late. We have a fresh take on things—a new perspective—and we see things for what they are. We feel it's just as much our responsibility to save our planet as it is the responsibility of the government, corporations or adults.

Can teenagers really make a difference?

Teenagers may not have the same rights as adults, but they still make up a large percentage of the population, and they can create a huge movement of people. If teens speak up and make enough noise about what they want, people will listen and what they believe in will be heard, whether or not they can propose their ideas before Congress. Adults or youth, the more people who are environmentally informed and aware, and the more people who make noise about helping the environment, the more things will get done on its behalf.

How will you get other young people involved?

One of the main goals of RelightNY is to get young people thinking about the environment and the ways in which they can help. It is imperative, therefore, that we make as many young people as possible aware of RelightNY and involve them in the project. We are the Internet generation, so we use social networking sites such as Facebook and our own Web site (www.relightny.com) to spread information about the project. Statistics from studies conducted by JWT show that people our age are worried about the environment and feel it is their responsibility to do something about it. We are concerned and ready to take action. Our goal is to create greater awareness among teenagers here in New York and throughout the country. We are starting with light bulbs, but we hope this is just the beginning of a larger movement toward environmental sustainability for our generation.

Why do you think it's important to supply the bulbs to low-income families?

This is just a starting place for our project, but it's very important that we start here. Fixed-income families do not necessarily have a choice as to which light bulbs they buy, and they tend to buy the cheapest ones, which are incandescent (even though CFLs more than make up for their initial higher costs with energy savings). If we supply CFLs to these families, their energy bills will decrease significantly and they will need to buy fewer bulbs in their lifetime. Not only will these bulbs reduce energy bills, they will also lower carbon emissions and help to increase environmental awareness, which we hope will inspire people to look for other ways to improve the environment.

Why focus on CFLs?

CFL (compact fluorescent light) bulbs create the same amount of light as incandescent bulbs but use one-third of the energy and last up to 10 times longer, which means less carbon is emitted from fossil fuel combustion.

They're a better option than incandescent bulbs because they save money. Each bulb will save about \$6 per year; that's roughly \$30 over the life of that bulb. Most families have approximately 30 light bulbs in their homes.

Replacing light bulbs is probably the easiest way anyone can be a part of the solution to climate change. Not only are CFLs easy to find and install, they are relatively inexpensive compared to a hybrid car. Simply replacing an incandescent with a CFL does not sacrifice any light or bulb function, yet it reduces carbon emissions tremendously. They're a catalyst for change and a simple path to environmental consciousness.

What are you giving up in terms of the rest of your lives (that is, extracurricular activities or homework or sleep) to do RelightNY?

Participating in RelightNY, while tremendously rewarding, is fairly time-consuming and challenging, but it has allowed us to learn many new things about the climate, global warming and how we can help the environment in ways other than replacing light bulbs. We often meet during lunch periods and on weekends in addition to the individual work we do on various parts of the project. Being a part of the project means we work as a team, which is its own reward.

How long do you anticipate championing RelightNY? Will you stay at it, or will you pass it off to next year's ninth graders?

RelightNY is a project and an activity that we hope to champion and maintain for many years. Though we don't intend to pass the project down to the students in the grades below us, it would be wonderful to grow and encompass all the younger students who want to join the project and to embrace their fresh thoughts and ideas. We also hope to spread the project to other cities and states, but for now we will focus on our own community: New York City.

Why New York and not national?

New York is our home, and it is home to millions of people who burn a tremendous amount of fuel. New York is headquarters to many large corporations, which makes it a good place to start fundraising. Also, with the assistance of organizations like HELP USA, we can get the light bulbs right into the homes of people who need them most, fellow New Yorkers.

Our hope is to be a model for what other teenagers can do in their own cities. In the future, RelightNY hopes to spread to different cities and light many different kinds of buildings. However, we are starting with low-income families because it's an opportunity to help the environment while directly helping people (and their pocketbooks) at the same time.

How do you respond to someone who says global warming does not exist or is not a problem?

For 10 million years, the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere remained between a concentration of 200 ppm and 280 ppm, until the world began to industrialize. Now the concentration is at a whopping 383 ppm. The increased combustion of fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum and natural gas causes these rising carbon levels. In the atmosphere, the carbon, along with other greenhouse gases, traps the sun's heat within the atmosphere. This is called the greenhouse effect. An overactive greenhouse effect, which is what we are experiencing now, will lead to rising sea levels, stronger storms, longer periods of drought, the spread of tropical diseases and the loss of fertile crop land. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a report in January 2007 stating that human activity is responsible for the increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere.

What are your kickoff goals?

Over the next four years, we hope to raise an average of \$250,000 a year, reaching \$1 million by the end of 2010, the year many of us will graduate from high school. This is an ambitious goal, but it is important to aim high. We will start buying and installing CFLs in low-income housing before the summer of 2007. As soon as we start installing the bulbs, we start making a difference—and the sooner we start making a difference, the better.

Why should companies participate?

Without donations, we cannot buy enough CFLs to distribute to low-income families. By donating to RelightNY, companies and corporations get an opportunity to help us control climate change and help low-income families save energy and money. Donating will also benefit a company through tax deductions, but more important, it will tell the public that a company cares about the environment and supports the youth who want to make a difference in the world.

Corporate donors will have their name and logo listed on our Web site, and will be recognized publicly through press releases.

How can companies donate?

Please send contributions to OSI/RelightNY
c/o Avery Hairston, 165 East 72nd Street, New York, NY 10021