



Two recent environment news stories have demonstrated admirably how environmental concerns and economics go together.

In this magazine's sister publication, [Construction National](#), there is a report from West Dunbartonshire Council of what happened when it fitted vehicle tracking systems to its 380 cars, minibuses, vans, refuse trucks, and road sweepers in 2010. Apart from the fuel savings deriving from not having to redirect vehicles, the council found that changes in driver behaviour resulted in substantial fuel savings – a year after fitting the systems the council reported it had saved around £100,000 in fuel costs. That saving was also reflected, of course, in a commensurate reduction in the council's carbon footprint as a result of reductions in CO

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emissions.

As far as I know, no vehicle tracking companies feature in the Environment Directory of this site, but it may not be long before they do.

Even the savings achieved in Dunbartonshire are small beer when it comes to those that have to be made by the NHS – some £30bn over the next few years. According to the Dr David Pencheon, director of its Sustainable Development Unit, a big slice of that could happen through energy saving and other sustainability measures. In the environment news section of this site he is reported as saying that as much as £89m can be saved annually by recycling medicines.

The wastage of medicines is truly staggering, not just in hospitals where a package of drugs is disposed of if not needed by the same patient again, but in the home. Many packs of drugs become surplus to requirements when we get better, thankfully, but even when they are

returned to a pharmacy they are simply disposed of. Many powerful pain killers are wasted in this way because of the progressive 'fine tuning' possible in pain control. It is also the case with nutrient drinks for people who are temporarily unable to eat, as was the situation in my own family recently following treatment for oral cancer. Could they not be usefully employed in emergency famine situations and following natural (or not-so-natural) disasters?

As Dr Pencheon points out, many of the drugs are manufactured many miles away, so the saving would not just be in materials and energy used to manufacture them, but also the transportation. It has long been recognised that the best way to persuade companies to become more environmentally aware: it's refreshing to see that the principal has found its way into the public sector.

In an Environment UK blog last month I alluded to the prospect of a drought in the South East as soon as it had stopped snowing and the possible dire consequences of water becoming a commodity. Almost immediately afterwards the BBC was reporting on the resurgence of the idea of a 'water grid' to move water around the country like electricity - particularly in the direction of London. Boris was behind it, of course: ever the eye for the main chance, so to speak. He was referring at the time to the fact that in parts of the UK it rains more than it does in others.

The Beeb quoted his *Telegraph* column: "The rain it raineth on the just and the unjust, says The Bible, but frankly it raineth a lot more in Scotland and Wales than it doth in England." The question arises, of course, as to how much Boris is prepared to pay for said water from an independent Scotland. Could the sound of the cash register be a key accompaniment to Mr Salmon's referendum?

However, having just walked past a TV tuned into the BBC's News channel, I noticed it was chucking it down in London - looked like snow!