

Roth: Are you dreaming of a green Christmas?

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on December 12, 2016.



Jim Roth is a Director and Chair of the firm's Clean Energy Practice.

Are you dreaming of a green Christmas?

Although White Christmas, the 1942 Irving Berlin classic made most famous by singer Bing Crosby, is a holiday staple in many American homes via iTunes, Pandora, an old CD or your retro turntable, a yearning for a different color this time of year has options too.

And if you are a retailer, you are most certainly hoping for a "green" Christmas in terms of economic activity, as America's

retail industry is expecting Americans to spend around \$3 trillion during the holidays, accounting for roughly 20 percent of the retail industry's total sales for the year. These annual bumps have typically also resulted in nearly 1 million employees being hired for the seasonal rush.

And if you are an electric utility provider you probably also appreciate that Americans annually string lights on their homes, trees, lawns and public buildings, consuming an additional 6-billion-plus kilowatt-hours of electricity every year. And yes, that sounds like a lot; in fact, it alone surpasses the annual consumption of some entire countries' electric consumption within our own hemisphere, yet it only accounts for about 0.2 percent of America's yearly consumption. And more modern LED lights, which are safer and cooler than incandescent lights, themselves consume much less electricity. So if your inner Clark Griswold is calling to redo his 25,000 twinkle light extravaganza, please consider the LED options to save some family budget for the eggnog.

But if you are longing for a greener, more sustainable celebration of Christmas this year, consider a series of small decisions that can make a big impact for the Peace on Earth around you. Let's take the debate on whether to get a real or an artificial tree this year for Christmas. There are certainly pros and cons for both.

Real Christmas trees, planted, grown and harvested on tree farms, have spent their lives absorbing a variety of air pollutants and in return emitting fresh oxygen to the world around them. Most farms replace the cut trees with seedlings that continue the benefits over time and all trees help to stabilize the soil and help reduce erosion. Yet most farms do use pesticides that linger in the atmosphere, including in your home, and these short-lived trees often end up as waste in city landfills or worse. Yet again, however, many cities are now creating mulching and composting programs around these discarded trees, turning a positive for the community.

Artificial Christmas trees do help families avoid many of the annual negatives about real trees, including the ability to reuse the same tree year after year, yet these trees are not without their own ecological footprint. While real trees may be shipped from as far away as Oregon (No. 1 source of America's Christmas trees), North Carolina (second) or Michigan (third), 80 percent of all artificial Christmas trees sold worldwide are from the Pearl River region of China, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Obviously the effort to transport any tree requires a carbon and energy footprint, and one can argue that a one-time trip for a 10-year tree may be no worse than annual trips from Oregon for 10 years in a row. These trees also contain non-biodegradable plastics, from petroleum-based products, and some worry they may get discarded earlier than their useful life might otherwise allow.

So what's a green-conscious person to do? Perhaps ask Santa for a live tree that you can plant in your own yard, to decorate and celebrate around for years to come and in turn teach your children the value of the living tree all seasons of the year. Merry Christmas.

Jim Roth, a former Oklahoma corporation commissioner, is an attorney with [Phillips Murrah P.C.](#) in Oklahoma City, where his practice focuses on clean, green energy for Oklahoma.