

Odds & Sods

Positive ideas for a changing world.

Meet the social changers

It's not easy being green, but it can feel a lot easier with a drink in hand and a few like-minded people to talk to. This may explain the success of Sustainability Drinks, a monthly get-together for professionals involved in sustainability in some way.

The event began in Melbourne in August 2007 with 10 people. It spread to Adelaide the following year and made its Sydney debut in September, with attendees getting a view of the Opera House as they wound down with their peers.

The format is simple: a guest speaker keeps it short and sweet, talking for about 10 minutes. Then everyone is left to do their own thing. Up to 300 people attend the monthly Melbourne event, Stefanie Menta, spokesperson for the event's organiser, the Shaper Group, told *OG*. "It's a really relaxed atmosphere," she said.

"The focus is on meeting your allies in the industry and having an informal chat. There's no agenda. It's not about selling things. It's about sharing ideas, saying 'Hi' and making contacts."

The non-profit event takes place in Melbourne on the first Wednesday of the month, Sydney on the second Wednesday of the month and Adelaide on the third Wednesday of the month. Entry is free, but drinks are not. Anyone wishing to attend needs to register beforehand.

• **To register, and for more details on dates and speakers, see www.sustainabilitydrinks.com or phone (03) 9614 6177.**

Have a 'sustainable' chat with like-minded people.



Sandra Steingraber speaks out about cancer-causing chemicals.

Kicking against the stream

A former scientist who became an award-winning environmental writer, Sandra Steingraber is also a survivor, having been diagnosed with bladder cancer in her 20s.

There was a lot of cancer in her family. Was it genetic? It couldn't have been: Steingraber was adopted. Perhaps, she thought, the cause was environmental. So she began to do some research. The result was a book: *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*. First published in 1997, and widely praised for the quality of its writing along with its scientifically sound arguments, the book was updated and republished this year (publisher: Perseus Books), to coincide with the release of a documentary, also called *Living Downstream*.

The doco, which follows Steingraber for a year as she travels around North America speaking out on the links between cancer and chemicals in the environment, is being screened selectively around the world. There were no plans for Australian screenings as *OG* went to press, but a DVD was about to become available. Steingraber has participated in briefings to the US Congress and the United Nations (passing a jar of her own breast milk around the UN delegates' table to make the point that even breast milk has become contaminated with chemicals).

She writes regular columns and essays, and is the author of an *Organic Manifesto*, a call for the world to embrace organic farming, a slower life and a chemical-free environment. Steingraber doesn't feel like a hero, she told online journal *terrain.org*. "Organic farmers are heroic. People who stand up and speak to their school boards and their city councils about toxic waste dumps in their own communities – risking the wrath of their neighbours and employers – those are the real heroes. I just try to supply the heroes with some useful, reliable science. And inspire them along the way."

• **To explore Sandra's works see www.steingraber.com**