

# Successful Software

...requires more than just good programming.

## Ship Of Fools

I recently had a 3 week holiday in Florida with my family. My 17 year old son is interested in rocketry and my wife is interested in wildlife. We got to see plenty of both and had a great time. There is a lot to like about America and Americans. But the sheer waste of resources on show everywhere was pretty shocking. In Europe we absolutely aren't doing enough to protect the environment and avert the impending climate catastrophe (I flew to Florida and drove a car there, so I am no environmental saint myself). In Florida they don't appear to be even trying.

Let's start with plastic. Everything seems to be made of plastic, wrapped in plastic or both. This is a hotel breakfast for the 3 of us. That is a serious amount of plastic.



Plastic cutlery is the order of the day. And even the plastic cutlery is individually wrapped in plastic! The very cheapest hotels in the UK give you metal cutlery.





Apples were individually wrapped in plastic.



We even saw oranges wrapped in plastic. Nature already provided oranges with their own wrapper! I don't remember the plastic issue being as bad when I travelled through Wyoming, Utah and Colorado in 1999. Maybe it's a hangover from COVID?

And then there are the cars. We did a quick informal survey and over half the vehicles on the road were massive SUVs and even more massive pickup trucks, with macho names like 'Raptor' and 'Titan'. The very low tax on petrol/gas (by European standards) makes this possible. These pickup trucks are clearly being used mostly by people from the suburbs who do not need a huge pickup truck. We hired a 'mid-size' (but big by European standards) SUV ourselves as, in a previous trip, we had found it quite intimidating to drive a European sized saloon car on American roads.

The front of these pick-up trucks is so high that a pedestrian hit by one is definitely going under, rather than over. Especially the ridiculous 'raised' pickup trucks, which are very common.



Not that there are many pedestrians in Florida, of course. You are expected to have a car and drive everywhere. You can even eat your breakfast in your car.



*The breakfast drive-thru queue at Fort Myers Dunkin Donuts.*

The provision of pavements/sidewalks is decidedly lacking and public transport is pretty much non-existent. If you are too poor to own a car, hard luck. There did seem to be some cycle lanes, but they ran along major roads and weren't segregated from all the enormous vehicles. They looked utterly terrifying. No wonder no-one was using them. Perhaps cyclists had tried, but they had all been run over.

Everywhere has air con and it all seems to run 24x7. Often with doors left open. When you turn up to your hotel/motel room, the air con is running and it doesn't turn off when you take your card out of the slot to leave the room. It has probably been running in every room since the hotel was built, regardless of whether the rooms are occupied or not. Heaven forbid that you should have to wait 2 minutes for the air con to cool the room down.

This might be ok if the air con was powered by solar. But it isn't. We hardly saw a solar panel in our whole trip to 'The Sunshine State'. This is hard to fathom, as there are solar panels everywhere in temperate and cloudy Britain. When we asked one of the locals why she didn't have solar, she told us that solar power was penalised by the power company, so it wasn't worth it. We didn't see a single wind turbine either.

The irony is that Florida is one of the most vulnerable places on earth to climate change. It is already ridiculously hot in the summer. A few more degrees of extra temperature will make it unbearable outside your air conditioned room or vehicle. Higher temperatures means more air con, which means more carbon in the atmosphere, which means even higher temperatures. Florida has a [mean elevation of just 31m/100ft](#) above sea level. The majority of Miami-Dade county is [less than 2m/6ft above sea level](#) (possibly less, depending on when you are reading this). The only thing we saw that looked like a hill in Florida, was in fact a huge landfill. Probably mostly full of single-use plastic cutlery. The rich are already starting to move to higher ground in Miami. Maybe only the landfills will be left above sea level by the end of the century? Florida is also regularly devastated by hurricanes. The devastation left by 2022 [category 5 hurricane Ian](#) is still very obvious and [category 4 hurricane Idalia](#) hit a few days after we left. Rising sea temperatures can only lead to more devastating hurricanes.

And Florida isn't even one of the worst offenders, placing 39th out of the 50 US states with around [10.8 metric tons of CO2 per capita per year](#). In part due to the lack of any heavy industry. The worst offending state in the USA is Wyoming with a whopping 104.5 metric tons of CO2 per capita per year. Across the country Americans average [15.3 tons per capita per year](#), compared to 5.6 tons for the UK. And the USA isn't even the worst offender. Qatar clocks in at 38.1 tons per capita per year.

Climate change is not some minor inconvenience where we lose a few obscure species of frogs and have to wear a bit more sunscreen. We could be talking about widescale crop failures and extreme weather events making large parts of the globe unliveable. Leading to famine and migration on a scale way beyond anything we have seen so far. Given the seriousness of the situation it is depressing to see such profligate waste. My fear is that other people will look at places like Florida and think "why am I even trying to do the right thing? Look at them!" and not even try.

We are in trouble. The current system of sovereign states with politicians driven by short-term goals is poorly placed to fix long-term, global problems. And the billionaires are not going to save us. They are the main beneficiaries of the current system and they are going to use their money and power to keep it that way. If we let them. Geo-engineering is hugely risky. Carbon sequestration looks unlikely to make any meaningful difference. Moving to



Mars is a pipedream for 99.9999% of the population. This is the only planet in the universe we have evolved to live on. We are stuck here with the mess we have created in a slow motion [tragedy of the commons](#). Individual choice is not going to cut it. We need deep structural change. Much higher taxes on fossil fuels and less enormous pickup trucks for a start. We need to get our act together, and soon. For ourselves and our children. But, having seen the situation in Florida, I don't hold out much hope.

This entry was posted in miscellaneous, off topic and tagged climate change, florida, ship of fools, usa on 19 September 2023 [<https://successfulsoftware.net/2023/09/19/ship-of-fools/>] by Andy Brice.

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## 2 thoughts on “Ship Of Fools”



Prepper

21 September 2023 at 4:07 pm

As someone who lives in a hot climate, a few meters above sea level, I can attest that we leave our A/C on all day long. It takes way too long to cool our home again, and it might not be bearable if we turn it off and come back during the day. The cooling time is several hours. It takes less than 1 hour with power off, to become unbearable. Last summer, it got over 32°C in our home, and it wasn't till evening for the cooling to be felt again. Our summers get well over 45°C, with nights dropping to about 40°C.

Yes, there's a plan to move, but this comes at its own cost. Yes I have a pickup truck (and use it for trips or hauling/towing). But I also own a car for commuting for work. There's no reasonable public transit here, the heat makes bicycling impossible, same with walking.

As for plastic everything... Its nuts. Apples, I can understand – there's no washing station, so you just open and eat. We don't peel our apples. Oranges seems a bit overboard till you realize if you cut with a knife, you need to wash the fruit – as the growers don't do it themselves.

We also refrigerate things that people in other countries don't, like eggs and ultra pasteurized milk. Everything here, is based on consumption and making foods go bad quicker, so we have to constantly buy more and consume more.

Only a revolution could get us right – but we'd have to be run by an ecological dictator to fix us. Anyone pro-business or susceptible to bribes would quickly run us back into the ground.

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**Andy Brice** Post author

21 September 2023 at 4:24 pm

Obviously I don't know anything about your house and cooling a whole house is likely to take longer than a hotel room to actively cool. But in some hot parts of the world they design houses to be passively cooled (and have done for hundreds or thousands of years). That doesn't seem to be a thing in Florida, as far as I can tell. Maybe there is no commercial incentive for the house builders.

A big truck is useful if you have something big to tow. But it seems to me that the vast majority of big trucks in Florida are only used for commuting and are just a show of status.

>Oranges seems a bit overboard till you realize if you cut with a knife, you need to wash the fruit

Only if the knife is dirty? I always peel oranges by hand.

>Everything here, is based on consumption and making foods go bad quicker, so we have to constantly buy more and consume more.

In Florida a lot of the food and drink is ultra-processed. Milk, cheese, bread, peanut butter etc. It tastes pretty nasty to my British taste buds. But I guess that is what Big Food will provide, if they can get away with it.

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