

FLASH SHEET #4 Gracia Janes , Environment Convener

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GLOBAL WARMING - Energy Conservation, Our Role

Ten years ago, NCWC was deep into its Energy Conservation Project . A survey had been sent to over 3000 people across Canada; research was done on energy conservation initiatives in Universities, schools, cities, Native communities, by the private sector and by federal and provincial governments , and the results sent out in a quarterly newsletter sent to all our members. As well, Councils were hosting many energy conservation meetings for the public in cities across the country eg. Fort St. John BC, Montreal QC, St. Catharines ON, Moncton NB. and Saskatoon, SASK. Results from the 565 people responding to the survey were tabulated, and a report with the findings and recommendations for action sent to the government. A few highlighting from the report are as follows :

* “The internalization of a conservation ethic resulting from government campaigns during the 2nd World War and the 70s oil crisis , is evident in the number of survey respondents who mentioned turning off the lights, turning down the heat, and using energy efficient cars..

*** To make further energy conservation changes instinctive in this way takes time effort and a major campaign at all levels to be effective, particularly as one respondent noted” we are too well adjusted to the good life !”**

* Another noted that “consumer goods are designed to emphasize wastefulness and planned obsolescence.” Perhaps more importantly, **there is no sense of crisis!**..

* Our survey shows that the **best medium for such a campaign is the news media.** Governments should take advantage of magazine and newspaper supplements . **TV and school campaigns** have also proven effective in the past eg. the 70s campaign in Ontario, to have students monitoring heating costs etc. **Children have often spearheaded needed change! ..**

* Many respondents mentioned cost. **“The cost benefit ratio for solar and other alternate forms of energy and energy conservation need to be promoted eg. If a solar water heater is purchased, how long will it take to recover the cost through savings in fuel or hydro bills?”** Alternative energy providers could get tax incentives equivalent to those given to producers of traditional sources of energy in order to lower costs to the consumer...**And governments could encourage research and development in this area...**

* The ‘energy connection’ has to be made clear. People need to understand the less obvious energy costs eg. the costs of transporting and treating water. As respondents said “I’m not always aware of the purpose for saving electricity.”

*** Respondents wished to know more about the available technologies and noted the scarcity and lack of variety. They need to know where to get them and have choices.**

* Apartment owners and builders need information and incentives to encourage the use of energy efficient materials and appliances, and in retrofits and new building construction.

***Governments could encourage research and development in this area and public/industry/government partnerships, such as Ontario’s Green Communities program, to help make homes more energy efficient, at a cost saving to owners and renters.**

* Many mentioned a **lack of #R programs** in communities. A continued effort should be made at the provincial level to implement and improve existing programs. **Reduction is the key!**

* Many respondents had good reasons for not walking, using transit, or bicycling - age, distance and land of public transit etc. **All levels of government would have public support for improved transit systems, use of car pools, bike trails and measures to discourage car use.**

* **People want to save energy! They are making an effort! They need information, affordable options, examples of success and encouragement!**

This survey was done 10 years ago, and it holds true to-day, especially in light of Canada's signing of the Kyoto accord. Energy conservation is estimated by many experts to hold the key to reduction of greenhouse gases. And we Canadians play a big role in helping this come about! As I noted in a 2002 brief to Ontario's Select Committee on Alternative Fuel sources "Most experts in the energy field agree that Canadians are energy gluttons, being the second highest per capita consumers of energy in the world, and that the potential for energy efficiency measures in Canada is enormous. ...and, 1993 Natural Resources Canada research concluded that Canada's energy efficiency potential is 30% by the year 2000."

I am sure that all of us are just as enthused to-day about energy conservation, as we were 10 years ago. We must not only make sure we explore as many options as we can to make it come about in our lives eg. personal resolutions to conserve energy; energy efficient appliances; alternative electricity sources eg. investing in green power, such as wind; home energy audits, but we must urge all levels of government to do their part. For example, **how about studying transportation in your community and making practical recommendations for improved transit. You could point out the many benefits , such as reduced greenhouse gases, less air pollution, ability for those on low incomes and without work or cars to get and keep jobs, and to get to other health and community services.**

It is encouraging that some governments have already acted to help their citizens. For example, just this week, in a news release , the Manitoba government has called upon "Manitobans to do their part to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and learn more about the challenges and opportunities associated with climate change, as part of a **public education campaign called Take Action on Climate change."** Conservation Minister Steve Ashton , said " **We encourage everyone to take very seriously the opportunity to change habits, reduce consumption and look to alternatives to the sources of energy we use and how we use them.**" . The government has also put out an "easy-to-read" tabloid brochure which will be available on a web site created for the campaign, which features a "what you can do" section and there is also information on reducing what is sent to landfills by being more selective while shopping for packaged goods. The action plan calls for "provincial action and highlights developments in Manitoba eg hydro, solar, and wind power , as well as advances in ethanol and hydrogen."

What a good start! Lets do our part and ask our respective governments to do the same!