

# The Green Worker



CUPE BC's Environment Committee Newsletter

April 2011

## Free trade agreements hurt communities at the roots

More and more free trade agreements? There is nothing free about it. They are costing you and I significantly as we lose our communities in the process. And there is no more important sector than agriculture and this too is being cut at the roots by free trade.

### *How is this happening?*

While the local farmer's market concept is catching hold and seems to be flourishing, the constant pressure by governments towards new international free trade agreements puts too much pressure on local suppliers to sell to outside markets.

Buyers are not able to find the quantities they need to supply the local food market, forcing them to provide more and more imported goods and produce.

We are in effect, producing less and less for our own market, and sending more and more out of the country. And once a new agreement is inked, there is little chance for us to

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*How does this make any sense, when we can't find enough locally-grown produce?*

turn this around. And how does this make any sense, when we can't find enough locally grown produce? While it may seem we are making good progress, our supply to local markets may have already reached a plateau.

What we need now is a commitment by our governments to improve linkages in farm production within our own markets, whether that is Canada-wide, provincial or at the regional or municipal level.

This linkage or "infrastructure" currently exists but is crumbling under the weight and pressure of the demands related to free trade and global markets.

### *Governments need to review practices*

It is time for our three levels of government to review the practice of leaving farming to market forces which are not in our control. They must consider legislation geared toward improving our local, provincial and national food distribution system.

### *Union workers have a role*

CUPE and other trade unions are effective lobbyists for working people. The 10 per cent shift is an excellent example of what we are capable of. But let's continue to pressure our governments at all levels to institute "laws" which are



aimed at supporting agriculture at the roots.

### *Enhanced labelling needed*

Grown in BC or grown in "XYZ" Region certification and labelling programs need to be enhanced. We must have a commitment from Government that they will not allow any further erosion of our local market infrastructure.

Abandoning a reckless pursuit of ill-conceived free trade agreements on a first-come first-served basis would be a good start.

### **Brent Voss**

CUPE Local 1136



See page 3

## INCINERATORS FOR WASTE DISPOSAL?



There is much debate about the use of incinerators for waste disposal. Currently, the GVRD is exploring the possibility of using incinerators instead of landfills to address Metro Vancouver's waste problem.

Incinerators are intended to reduce the amount of waste filling our landfills and in some cases to generate energy. Toxins from waste in landfills frequently leeches into our waterways, contaminating all living things, including human beings.

Environmentalists fear incinerators could escalate global warming and lead to the release of environmentally harmful toxins such as dioxin and nonparticles, a recently recognized agent feared to be extremely

dangerous to the health of living beings.

The use of incinerators could undermine reduce, reuse and recycling initiatives by destroying products that would otherwise be recycled, thereby reducing the drain on valuable earth resources.

Without further exploration into their potential impact, we must exercise extreme caution before agreeing to the use of incinerators in order to address our waste problems.

### **Sheryl Burns**

*Co-chair, Environment Committee*

## So what is a green job anyway?

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) says that green jobs are work that "contributes substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality."

The UNEP goes on to say that green jobs are jobs that "help protect ecosystems and biodiversity, reduce energy, materials and water consumption through high efficiency strategies, de-carbonize

the economy and minimize or avoid generation of all forms of waste and pollution."

### ***Need some examples?***

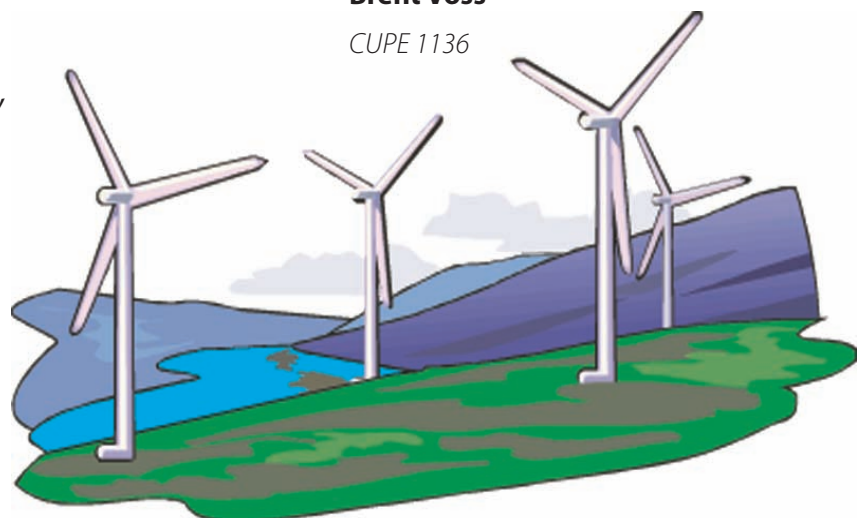
Here are some areas and jobs that will proliferate in the next decade in a green world despite government inaction.

- Farmer (no farm too small)
- Forester
- Energy Efficiency Builder
- Solar Power Installer
- Wind Turbine Fabricator
- Conservation Biologist
- Recycler
- Green Entrepreneur
- Sustainability Systems Developer
- Urban Planner

*“Despite government inaction, Canada’s environmental job market is growing at 60 per cent faster than employment in the overall economy.”*

– **Stephen Hazell**

Executive Director, Sierra Club Canada Foundation



### **Brent Voss**

*CUPE 1136*

## Going fragrance-free: for the environment and people with chemical sensitivity



An increasing number of products are labelled “scent or fragrance-free”. This is because there is growing recognition of the harm scented products can cause the environment and those around us. Many cleaning and beauty products are scented, causing harm to our air and waterways. Toxins in these products have been linked to cancer, in particular breast cancer.

Many people around us are chemically sensitive with severe allergies to various scents, causing diverse and multiple symptoms such as headaches, sore throat, itchy eyes and extreme fatigue. We can protect ourselves, other people and the environment by switching to cleaning and beauty products that are fragrance-free and less toxic.

### Sheryl Burns

*Co-chair, Environment Committee*

## FCM Sustainability Conference Review

Leave it to the Mayor of Seattle to highlight how working with Labour Unions is an important part of coalition building on sustainability planning.

In a three mayor panel, Gregor Robertson of Vancouver, Dean Fortin of Victoria and Mike McGinn of Seattle held an open discussion

on sustainability achievements in their municipalities. While all three Mayor’s had a lot of accomplishments to boast about, only one – Seattle Mayor, Mike McGinn, spoke on the importance of working with Labour on the development of Trades certification in new Green jobs such as solar and wind power generation equipment.

### CUPE BC a valuable resource and ally

This reflection shows the importance of CUPE BC in approaching

municipal politicians to ensure they understand CUPE is a valuable resource and an ally in developing environmentally-friendly communities.

Let’s keep on our elected officials at all levels to ensure a healthy planet for future generations of CUPE members.

### Trevor Davies

*Chair, Environment Committee*

## Ten Percent Shift – good for local economies, and the environment

CUPE BC’s Ten Percent Shift campaign is starting to gather a head of steam. Just over a month after its launch, the campaign to support vibrant and sustainable local economies has seen nearly 200 people take the pledge to shift ten percent of their spending to locally owned businesses and locally produced goods and services.

If enough people make the Shift, the benefits to local economies and jobs are obvious. But the Shift is good for the environment, too. Shopping locally means less fuel consumption and fewer greenhouse gas emissions, both for the consumer and the supplier. It’s time to reject the old notion that protecting the environment means hurting the economy; taking the Ten Percent Shift reduces our carbon footprint at the same time as it expands the economic opportunities in communities.

Check out [www.tenpercentshift.ca](http://www.tenpercentshift.ca) and take the Ten Percent Shift pledge!



# CLIMATE ZOMBIES

Climate Change has created a new phenomena – “Climate Zombies.”

Climate Zombies are quickly populating our elected houses in both the United States and Canada. They are funded and supported by some of the wealthiest people on earth. Far right-wing ideologues who are doing everything in their power to prevent mankind from fighting Greenhouse Gas emissions as they say it will ruin the economy and their bottom line.

Climate Zombies are politicians in government who support the denial of the effects of Climate Change on the world. The 112th Congress in the United States is now populated with a majority of Zombies. Very scary.

These Zombies express the classic variants of global warming denial. “The planet is not warming, that extreme cold weather refutes these concerns.” Zombies claim that man’s influence is unclear, that climate scientists are engaged in a hoax, scam or corrupt conspiracy and that limiting greenhouse gases would have no impact on global warming.

Recently the Climate Change Accountability Act was introduced into parliament by the NDP, Bill C 311. It was designed to :

- Cut greenhouse gas emissions 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% by 2050
- Mandate the government to set regulations that ensure targets are met

- Punish polluters who break regulations
- Ensure government accountability with publicized 5-year target plans
- Establish independent reviews to ensure government measures reach targets

Despite Parliament passing this Bill twice, it was delayed in the Senate, which allowed Canada to enter the 2010 climate change conference in Cancún with no clear direction.

In fact the Senate voted it down, in an unheard of act, with no debate. Prime Minister Harper ordered the vote while many Liberal Senators were not in the Chamber. Harper has done what he has long said he would not do, use an unelected body to interfere with law in this country.



**Beware of climate zombies.**

We were voted the “Fossil of the Year” at Cancún.

This would make Harper the biggest “Zombie” of them all.

We need to bring back Bill C-311.

**Doug Elford**

*CUPE Local 15*

**Sign CUPE BC's Environment Committee petition and add your voice or write a letter against an Enbridge pipeline in B.C. Visit: [www.pipeupagainstenbridge.ca](http://www.pipeupagainstenbridge.ca)**

The Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline Project will have an irreversible impact on the health of those who live near waterways into which tar sands toxins are released, on wildlife and on our environment.



Should an oil spill occur as a result of the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline Project, taxpayers will be responsible for the cost of the cleanup to the tune of billions of dollars.

**Download the petition from the Action Centre on CUPE BC's web site.**