



The Green Worker

Environment Committee Newsletter

Spring 2008

Getting started

So you're ready to take action at your workplace on environmental issues. Great! There are many unique and creative initiatives that CUPE members can do for a "Healthy, Clean & Green" work environment.

Things like a workplace environment policy that sets targets for greenhouse gas reduction, or a waste reduction program, or a conservation program that emphasizes the efficient use of all workplace resources.

For more information on these and other great ideas check out CUPE National's publication, "Healthy, Clean & Green, A Workers' Action Guide to a Greener Workplace."



Lead by example

With global warming in the forefront of our lives, sometimes it can feel as though things like turning off the tap when we brush our teeth are insignificant, especially in the face of melting polar ice.

Be assured though, every ounce of water you conserve, every watt of power you save and every green pepper you purchase from a local organic grower sends a message that takes us ever closer to a cooler planet.

It doesn't always mean a march on Parliament Hill, more often it starts with 'leading by example'.

Tell your grocer you don't want tomatoes grown in Mexico and ripened on route with ethylene gas. Explain to your neighbour that municipal water is better regulated.

Get informed. The more you know, the more effective your choices, actions and movement will be.

Bev LaPointe, Committee Chair, CUPE 339

CUPE in the Valley says no to factory-farmed products

The demand for meat products has given rise to 'factory farming' or Concentrated (or Confined) Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) as a form of farming practice. The Fraser Valley has the highest animal stock density in Canada.

Manure wastes from CAFO's leach into nearby water sources and pollute waterways over a great distance, contaminating fish, shellfish and compromising aquatic ecosystems.

When CUPE members purchase farm products from producers who employ sustainable farming and production practices, we promote ecological balance within a farmed area, which in turn promotes healthier communities for CUPE members and our families.

Louise Piper, CUPE 458

TIP: Get off the 'bottle'



By buying bottled water, you are encouraging the industry to commodify a priceless public resource, draining underground aquifers and disrupting ecosystems without sufficient environmental assessment.

Top 5 reasons not to buy bottled water.

1. It is often little more than filtered tap water.
2. The industry drains underground aquifers without sufficient environmental assessment.
3. Bottled water is less regulated than tap water.
4. A million and a half tons of polluting plastic is used to make all those bottles.
5. Plastic bottles could be leaching contaminants into your water.

CUPE joins community to keep land in ALR

CUPE members and residents of Powell River received some good news late September 2007 when the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) decided that their agricultural land base was not for sale.

For several months a large package of land currently protected in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), was under attack by the YRAINUCEP Corporation who wanted the land for the development of a gated community with private airport, equestrian centre, golf course and much, much more.

After much pressure and letter writing by CUPE members and other opponents of this proposal, the ALC determined that the long-term benefits to the community of keeping the land in the ALR, massively outweighed any short-term benefits that would be gained by the corporate proposal.



YRAINUCEP has already been turned down in Sechelt and now Powell River so watch out for them coming to a community near you.

Barry Randle, CUPE 476

CUPE protects environment

CUPE and the Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS) bring workers and environmentalists together on cooperative initiatives that benefit working people and the environment. Projects like the Cleaners and Toxins workshops have helped CUPE members in schools get healthier, greener cleaning products while promoting a positive image for

CUPE in the community as a protector of the environment.

Message from CUPE BC Environment Committee Chair

With the “unequivocal” truth that global warming is caused by human activity and is getting worse, governments around the world are setting targets (albeit some kicking and screaming) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



As chair of the CUPE BC Environment Committee I am struck by the dedication of committee members to lead by example with targets that meet or exceed no less than what we would demand from the government.

By choosing greener forms of communication such as email and conference calling, over ‘fossil’ travel, the committee continues to reduce its carbon footprint by 50 per cent per 2-year term.

Are virtual meetings ideal? Maybe not.
Is scorching our planet ideal? For sure not!



-- Bev LaPointe

CUPE & toxin-free schools

CUPE is working with the Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS) on a toxins-free schools initiative that will help us build networks with teachers and parents.

LEAS has published the popular *CancerSmart* Consumer Guide, which has been distributed all across the country and has been used by many CUPE locals in conferences and workshops in promoting the ‘right to know’ for consumers.

Earth Day

CUPE has promoted labour’s participation in Earth Day events for several years. CUPE also uses Earth Day as a springboard to workplace action on environmental issues. CUPE has urged locals to start or expand recycling programs in their workplaces, conduct environmental audits on or near Earth Day and to pass an Earth Day declaration or resolution that strives for sustainability at work and in the community.



Doug Elford, CUPE 15

Help Protect B.C.'s Sacred Headwaters from Shell Coalbed Methane!



Coalbed methane is a fossil fuel trapped in coal seams underground. The extraction has caused serious environmental damage nearly everywhere it has been tried in North America.

With its deplorable environmental and civil rights record, Royal Dutch Shell is one of the world's worst polluters, using one of the planet's most destructive forms of resource extraction.

If Shell's plan for the Sacred Headwaters goes ahead, this rich alpine landscape will be turned into an industrial wasteland, a maze of roads, pipelines, and gas wells. CUPE opposes coalbed methane and has issued a donation to the Skeena Watershed Coalition for their work on stopping this project.

Take action:
<http://www.cupe.bc.ca/408>

Protect B.C. rivers and wilderness

In early 2003, the Liberal government signed a deal with BC Hydro and Bermuda-based Accenture. The deal privatized one-third of BC Hydro's workers and operations; left BC Hydro unable to generate any new power; and was signed without regulatory approval and void of public knowledge.

Results of this deal have seen significant environmental destruction from Micro Hydro Dams or "run-of-river" projects on B.C.'s rivers. To date, there has been a frenzy of over 500

Micro Hydro Dam licenses issued on B.C. rivers.

In the absence of adequate environmental legislation that reliably assesses the environmental impact, it is ever more important that CUPE members demand progressive legislation that protects B.C.'s rivers and wilderness from the devastating environmental impact of these projects.



Louise Piper, CUPE 458

TILMA and the environment

Under the TILMA any laws, programs or policies from local governments aimed at things like reducing greenhouse emissions, air pollutants or protecting endangered species will not be permitted if it is decided that they overly restrict trade or investment.

And just who will be the judge and jury in this decision?

One thing is for sure, no input from environmental groups or the public is required in reaching a decision. What you have instead, is a dispute panel – not an 'elected' dispute panel, but an 'appointed' dispute panel – whose tenure is aimed exclusively at boosting trade and investment...hardly who we want making profound decisions around our environment

Brent Voss, CUPE 1136

Are biofuels the answer to the energy crisis?



They are part of a variety of energy sources.

Biofuels can be made from many sources, such as sugar cane, starch, vegetable oil, animal fats, corn, algae, etc. They are biodegradable and therefore, relatively harmless to the environment.

However with increasing global pressure to produce crops for biofuels, it is not likely that we will see a decline in world hunger anytime soon.

Interestingly, Henry Ford originally designed the Ford Model T to run completely on ethanol. Also did you know that 5 per cent of a car's fuel can be wasted by under-inflated tires? So be sure to have your car tires inflated properly.

Carol Mauriello, CUPE

Peace and global warming

Global warming and climate change are causing habitat destruction, extinction of species, disappearing water sources, crop failures and rising sea levels. Natural disasters and dramatic weather changes have become common occurrences

CUPE members in Vancouver got a taste of dramatic weather when intense wind blew hundreds of trees down in Stanley Park, closing the seawall for months and costing taxpayers over 9 million.

As the planet warms, water sources disappear leaving less available fresh water that humans, plants and animals must all compete for.

In the north, we see rapidly melting ice in the Northwest Passage that has caused friction between the US, Russia and Canada over shipping rights in the Arctic. Worldwide, leaders are at odds over how to address global warming.

As CUPE members and concerned citizens, we can help encourage peace by electing leaders who will take action to protect our resources through sustainable legislation.

Sheryl Burns, CUPE 1936

How fresh is fresh air?

The 2008 Heart and Stroke Foundation Report Card on Canadians' Health reports dramatic increases in the rate of heart disease and hospitalizations due to pollution induced heart attacks and strokes.

When it comes to airborne fine particulate matter, the report also states that one in ten Canadians don't make the connection between air pollution and cardiovascular disease.

Interestingly, the study found nearly 70 per cent of Canadians think air pollution tends to be worse during the summer while the reality is; air pollution is a year-long problem.

So, next time you step outside for a "breath of fresh air" ask yourself, 'how fresh is fresh air'?

CUPE members can help reduce the health impact of pollution by using public transit, walking, cycling and recycling!

Take action: <http://www.cupe.bc.ca/408>.

QUOTES AND SNIPPETS

Take the bus

One public bus full of passengers takes roughly 40 cars off the road in rush hour, saving 168 tons of greenhouse gases and 70,000 litres of gasoline, according to Environment Canada.

Hole-e-hoses

Soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems can be more efficient than old-fashioned sprinklers if they are used right. Water loamy soil with these for 30 – 40 minutes once a week, sandy soil more and clay soil less. Burying the hose under your mulch will help prevent water from evaporating.



Patio lanterns

Time to replace those old patio lanterns with new LED lights, actually who needs electric lights at all, when solar lights can keep your yard lit long into the night. Better yet, why not just enjoy the stars!

Smart choices at home

For outdoor furniture, naturally weather-resistant bamboo is an exotic option that's actually sustainable, since bamboo grows so incredibly fast. What about considering bamboo when installing hardwood flooring.

To ensure you are not taking food from the Panda bears, if you go to www.silkroadflooring.com you can read about their EcoLogo certified bamboo flooring, made from a type of bamboo that isn't a food source or habitat for our friends the Panda's.

Worms

Worms eat half their weight in food, then poop it out into valuable odour-free worm manure called castings. Be sure to use worm friendly products in your garden.



You do have a garden don't you?
