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Raise your Environmental Consciousness in 2008

In the last column of the year for 2007, I asked the question: "Would you change?" It's a big decision and I hope you've taken up the challenge.

In 2008, I intend to focus many of my columns on this question of change, and the actions you can take to reduce your environmental impact. Some of the information will challenge you, some may inconvenience you, some will save you money and time, and some may even make you and your family healthier and happier.

I will also provide information and links to help support your research. You'll want to make your own educated and informed decisions as to why you should lower your carbon footprint and how to do it - at home, at work, at school and on the road.

Carbon footprint has been defined as a "measure of the impact human activities have on the environment in terms of the amount of greenhouse gases produced, measured in units of carbon dioxide". It is intended to help individuals and organizations conceptualize their own impact on climate change.

Whether you are at the beginning or advanced stages of reducing your carbon footprint, the Government of Canada has some helpful information and tools on their Office of Energy Efficiency website (www.oeenrcan.gc.ca). This site provides 'made in Canada' information for both personal and business use including buying new appliances or equipment, changing your heating source, buying a vehicle, renovating your home or workplace, etc.

In the 'personal vehicles' section of this website you can compare the fuel efficiency and CO₂ emissions (greenhouse gases) of thousands of vehicles made from 1995 to 2008. With analysts predicting that gas prices may rise to \$1.50/litre by this summer, fuel efficiency should be high on your list of considerations when you purchase a car. But you should also pay some attention to the kilograms of CO₂ that the vehicle puts into the atmosphere annually. Finding a car that reduces your CO₂ emissions will contribute significantly to lowering your carbon footprint.

Think about this - the average Canadian household creates about 11 tonnes of carbon emissions (CO₂) per year. That's about 3 Olympic sized swimming pools of carbon dioxide each year going out in to the environment. Transportation is the biggest contributor to that number. The cars we drive, air travel, public transportation, and taxis all add up to about 80 percent of our average household emissions.

Another innovative website, www.cooldrivepass.com, has a very easy tool for calculating

one's carbon footprint from vehicle use, and even compares you to the average Canadian in terms of vehicle-generated carbon emissions.

I've made 2008 the year to move from playing around at the margins of environmental change to taking some larger steps to reduce my family's carbon footprint, and also to help support and inform others on how to do the same. If many of us commit to this - I believe we can create an 'eco-tipping point' here in Fredericton, which may just serve as an environmental example far beyond our little city.

Eco-tipping points are levers for restoring sustainability to our imperiled environment. Small actions can make a big difference when they tap the inborn powers of nature and human societies to heal themselves. Check out some incredible stories about what other communities around the world are doing at www.ecotippingpoints.org

Twenty-two centuries ago, Archimedes said that, with the right lever and the right place to stand, he could move the world. "The power of one" - you - is indeed real. And today, more than ever, our world needs the right levers to tip our planet and its ecological systems back from the brink.

Don't doubt that it is happening. Quietly, all around the globe, eco-tipping points are emerging. Environmental pioneers in community organizations, business, and government are demonstrating how the right change can turn ecosystems away from ruin and back towards health and sustainability. With your help, Fredericton too can be an environmental pioneer.

Sonya Hull is Project Manager for the City's Green Matters greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction campaign which aims to reduce community greenhouse gas emissions by 6 percent by 2010. For more information on how you can help check out www.greenmattersfredericton.com