

Manitoba communities take action to reduce GHG emissions and fight climate change

By Brendan Boyd, Management Intern with the Community Led Emissions Reduction Program

The Manitoba Government has made climate change an important priority and is working with Manitobans in their communities to develop solutions to this problem. Even though our province's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are among the lowest in North America, Manitoba has taken significant action to reduce these emissions and fight climate change.

In 2008, the government enacted legislation and committed to meetings its Kyoto target of a 6% reduction in emissions below 1990 levels by 2012. It also launched Beyond Kyoto, a provincial strategy for meetings that target.

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An important part of the Beyond Kyoto strategy is working with local governments and supporting their actions to develop sustainable communities and reduce GHG emissions. There are initiatives already underway in the areas of:

- land-use planning
- funding for public and alternative transportation
- energy efficiency
- land-fill gas management
- green schools

The province is also supporting not-for-profit organizations such as Resource Conservation Manitoba and Climate Change Connection that provide information, education and other resources to local governments and communities.

Local governments will be affected by climate change in a variety of ways including:

- the economic, social and health consequences of environmental change such as shoreline erosion, loss of natural resources like crops and forests due to pests or droughts, increased severe weather events such as tornadoes, floods and ice storms, and the effect of air quality on human health

- the need to adapt their infrastructure and land use planning since changing weather patterns and more erratic weather may require different infrastructure or planning considerations such as water supply, storm management, road operations and maintenance

Early action to reduce greenhouse gases is wise because the cost of climate change can be significant. Communities and businesses around the province are moving to take advantage of the emerging green economy and are benefiting from the local economic development that follows. Early action has spinoff benefits

such as cost savings for municipal operations and individual households, improved public health and safer, cleaner communities.

Corlie Larsen, Acting CAO for the RM of St. Laurent, describes some of the benefits their community has seen. Larson says, “We are actively pursuing several community projects at the moment. One success story is the recent installation of artificial ice in the local arena and subsequent improvement to the heating and cooling (air conditioning) of the local recreation centre which houses a meeting hall, bowling alleys and government offices. This project proved to be an economic success to the recreation centre by providing these improvements via the installation of a geothermal system to provide the required energy for the heating and cooling of these buildings. It has also proven successful in providing additional play time in the arena for the local children and adults and a much more functional and energy efficient building for all users.”

According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, up to half of Canada's GHG emissions are under the direct or indirect control or influence of municipal governments. This means the most important contribution we can make as politicians or civil

servants is to provide leadership on this important issue through our own actions and commitment. Municipalities play a critical role in reducing GHG emissions and may have an advantage over senior levels of government in adapting to climate change. Local circumstances and effects will require different local responses.

The decisions local governments make about their operations and services have an effect on climate change. For example:

- policy or regulatory decisions such as green purchasing guidelines, anti-idling bylaws or green building regulations
- management of municipal operations such as fleet choices, energy choices for public buildings and maintenance of public spaces
- services provided to citizens such as recycling, composting or active or alternative transportation

Individual citizens can also play a large role by changing the way they use energy and water, how they dispose of waste and what type of transportation they use. Municipalities can promote more sustainable communities by helping their citizens make choices that limit and reduce their GHG emissions.

The province is supporting community-led initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases. For example, Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs has launched a new, four-year (2008/2012) Community Led Emissions Reduction (CLER) program pilot aimed at helping more Manitobans contribute to the fight against climate change.

Fourteen rural and urban centres, including six neighbourhood organizations, have been selected for funding under this new initiative (see sidebar). Local governments and not-for-profit community organizations are working together with the Manitoba Government and will receive support for local projects and activities that reduce GHG emissions. The experiences gained through this pilot will be shared with any local government that is interested in developing a local climate change action plan for their community.

The CLER program builds on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Partners for Climate Protection Program and is being implemented in two ways:

- in partnership with local governments and aimed at reducing corporate and community emissions
- in partnership with not-for-profit community organizations and aimed at individual behavioural change

The program is being delivered in partnership with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Manitoba Hydro and local environmental organizations such as Resource Conservation Manitoba and Climate Change Connection.

Participants in the program will work through five stages before 2012:

- creating a baseline inventory and forecast of GHG emissions
- setting targets for GHG reductions
- creating a local action plan with public input
- implementing projects and activities in the local action plan
- monitoring, measuring and reporting on progress

The action plan may include projects and activities in the areas of waste-reduction, water management, transportation, energy measures, green procurement,

green landscaping and lawn care measures and land use measures.

Tom Keep, Community Development Coordinator for Environmental Projects, says “The City of Brandon will continue to be a recognized leader in environmental stewardship as it moves forward in partnering with the Province of Manitoba and the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation to provide information for its citizens to be aware of opportunities to reduce their greenhouse gas footprint as individuals,

neighbourhoods and as a community.” Recycling, bikeways, reducing electricity consumption, reduction of water consumption, landfill gas recovery are some of the projects currently underway.

CLER is an important part of the province’s strategy on climate change. The program supports and builds on the dedication of individuals and local organizations that are working to reduce their GHG emissions and create more sustainable communities.

Participants

The following local governments, including one planning district, are participating:

- Brandon
- Virden
- Thompson
- De Salaberry
- St. Laurent
- St. Pierre-Jolys
- Notre Dame de Lourdes
- the Morden, Stanley, Thompson Winkler Planning District (which is responsible for planning for the municipalities of Morden, Stanley, Thompson and Winkler)

Not-for-profit community organizations such as schools, community centres and Neighbourhoods Alive! Renewal Corporations are participating in select urban neighbourhoods:

- City of Winnipeg (neighbourhoods of Fort Richmond, Daniel McIntyre, St. Matthews, and River-view)
- West St. Paul (Middlechurch)
- Brandon (city centre)

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