



**GREENER  
UNION**



Small Steps to a  
**Greener Union**



Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation  
Fédération des enseignantes-enseignants des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario



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# Small Steps to a Greener Union

As the first decade of the new millennium draws to a close, many of the warnings on climate change and the destruction of our planet are finally being heard. OSSTF/FEESO members are very aware of environmental issues and they want to be sure our organization is doing its part to protect the environment.

As a result of this desire, the Provincial Executive proposed that we establish an Ad Hoc Environmental Workgroup made up of one Provincial Executive member, one Provincial Office staff member and five members from the field. The Workgroup gathered information and discussed best practices for the environmentally friendly operation of OSSTF/FEESO. The information was used to develop the following report with recommendations including a checklist and resource materials for positive environmental practices.

The Workgroup recognized that each District and Bargaining Unit faces unique challenges and barriers when attempting to make their operations more environmentally friendly. The purpose of the report is to provide encouragement and support for future endeavours, not to suggest that there is a simple one-size-fits-all template for everyone in the province. We understood from the beginning that each District and Bargaining Unit would have to pick and choose the initiatives that would best serve its individual needs.

At the same time, we attempted to provide support materials and options for each area of concern in order to inspire creative solutions to the challenges we would face when reducing our ecological footprint. Improvements will be a challenge but we strongly feel that OSSTF/FEESO should, whenever possible, provide a positive example for others in education to emulate.

Taking *small steps to a greener union* can be fun, cost-effective and ethically satisfying. In addition, it will leave us with a good feeling knowing that we in OSSTF/FEESO are accepting our environmental challenges and are prepared to do our part to make our world a little better.

We hope that this report will give you some tools to do this.

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Reduce: use as little as possible. If a product must be used, reuse it as many times as possible. When it can no longer serve its purpose, recycle it into something else.

# PAPER USE

**A**n organization the size of OSSTF/FEESO uses an incredible amount of paper every day. When you consider the significant amount of trees and water needed to produce this paper, and the cost-effective and accessible recycled options, it becomes clear that this is an area where our organization could easily make a measurable impact. In our efforts to create paperless workplaces, we can easily take advantage of the options that are available to the Provincial Office and all of our Districts and Bargaining Units.

## CHECKLIST

- Recycle all of your paper waste.
- Double side all of your copies and save one sided sheets for re-use whenever possible.
- Source all your paper needs from 100% post consumer sources and from Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) approved suppliers. This would ensure that a minimum number of trees are harvested for our use. A list of products and suppliers is available at [www.fscscanada.org](http://www.fscscanada.org).
- To avoid the use of paper, follow the lead of Ontario hospitals by providing executive members with data retrieval devices and the training to use them to their full potential.
- Email materials for meetings in advance and print off only copies when needed for discussion.
- Update websites on a regular basis and train members to use web sites and wikis more frequently and effectively.
- Provide meeting reports and other information on flash drives, and encourage the use of personal laptops. The flash drives can be returned for re-use. It may be more time-efficient to post agendas, minutes and reports on the web than to put them on a flash drive, but consider the security of the information. Use only password-protected web sites and wikis.
- Change the default settings on your word processor, spreadsheet, etc., to get the most out of your paper and ink. Narrow the margins, reduce the font size and select an eco-sensitive font.
- Switch to Spranq Eco Sans font for printed correspondence. This font will save up to 20% of your ink and will help make your cartridges last longer, with little noticeable difference in print quality. ([www.ecofont.eu/downloads](http://www.ecofont.eu/downloads))

## RESOURCES

FSC products—[www.fscscanada.org](http://www.fscscanada.org)

Ecofont download—[www.ecofont.eu/downloads](http://www.ecofont.eu/downloads)



### DID YOU KNOW?

Recycling 54 kg of newspaper will save one tree. (Source: Government of Canada, Digital Collection)

Paper and paper products account for more than 1/3 of all Canada's waste. (Source: Environment Canada)

Canada uses 6 million tonnes of paper and paperboard annually. Only 1/4 of Canada's waste paper and paperboard is recycled. (Source: Environment Canada)

# ENERGY USE

**T**he idea behind an environmentally friendly energy policy is centred on using as few resources as possible. The benefit of such an approach is two-fold, with a reduction in consumption being planet-friendly as well as saving the organization money. In the end, when we have exhausted all attempts to curb our usage, we should be choosing environmentally responsible means to supply the power we need to function.

## CHECKLIST

- Switch to Bullfrog Power ([www.bullfrogpower.com](http://www.bullfrogpower.com)). This change is seamless as there are no changes to lines, set up or any other infrastructure. By using Bullfrog, your District and Bargaining Unit would ensure that the power used to fuel the building is being provided by only sustainable and minimally-polluting sources such as wind, solar and hydro electric. There would be a small increase in costs (a dollar a day for houses, less for an office, probably more for a building the size of 60 Mobile) but this increase can be off-set through conservation.
- Install programmable thermostats. They can bring significant savings by altering heating and cooling temperatures by a degree or two when the building or rooms are not in use.
- Kill the Phantom. Completely power down computers and electronic equipment at night. This is easy if you plug them into power bars and turn the power bars off as you leave. Or simply unplug everything. This will eliminate the phantom load that many appliances draw even when not turned on.
- Minimize lighting. Turning off lights, especially in the evening, not only saves energy but a significant number of birds that die every year from striking illuminated windows. More information can be found at [www.toronto.ca/lightout](http://www.toronto.ca/lightout).
- Get an energy audit. There are several organizations that provide this service, often at minimal cost, that could suggest significant changes to insulation etc. More information can be found at [www.ntgc.ca](http://www.ntgc.ca).
- Consider a solar hot water system, the most cost-effective use of solar energy. Although a solar hot water heater requires a large initial investment, it can pay for itself in as little as 5 years and then the savings continue. Information, as well as the details of a sales tax rebate offered by the Ontario Government, can be found at [www.energy.gov.on.ca](http://www.energy.gov.on.ca).
- If you own a building, invest in an energy retrofit. Details and suggestions for financing can be found at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca).

## RESOURCES

Bullfrog power—[www.bullfrogpower.com](http://www.bullfrogpower.com)  
Minimize lighting—[www.toronto.ca/lightout](http://www.toronto.ca/lightout)  
Energy retrofit—[www.energy.gov.on.ca](http://www.energy.gov.on.ca)  
Building retrofit—[www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)



## DID YOU KNOW?

If every Canadian household replaced one standard 60-watt incandescent light bulb with a 20-watt compact fluorescent light bulb, we could prevent 400,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere (equal to the removal of 66,000 cars from the road) and save \$73 million a year in energy costs. (Source Environment Canada)

According to a Cornell University study, we are using the equivalent of seven electrical generating plants just to supply standby energy to electronics that are turned “off.” (Source: Environment Canada)

# FOOD

**F**ood sustains life, but in many parts of the world it is a scarce commodity. Considering the significant environmental and economic costs of producing and transporting food, and disposing of packaging and wasting food, this is an area where our organization could make a measurable impact.

## CHECKLIST

- Buy locally produced foods whenever possible. If you hire a caterer or book a conference, ask whether they source their food locally.
- Buy organic products whenever possible. If you hire a caterer or book a conference, ask whether they use organic food.
- Introduce meat-free options at meetings and events to cut down on energy and water use.
- Avoid the use of disposable containers from restaurants when ordering food for union events. Ask whether restaurants carry reusable or recyclable containers and choose from restaurants that do.
- Avoid the use of disposable items such as plastic cutlery and glasses that are often not recyclable, in favour of traditional tableware that can be washed and reused.
- Avoid the use of single serve items such as individual creamers and sugars.
- Minimize food wastage by informing food preparers of the exact number of participants. If you can reevaluate the quantity needed as the event is on-going, this may help minimize waste.
- Encourage participants to bring reusable containers to take home excess food, or donate surplus usable foods to charities where possible and permitted by local health regulations.
- Compost any excess food (see Composting section for ideas).
- Make responsible choices when ordering fish  
([http://www.seachoice.org/files/asset/file/37/SeaChoice\\_Alertcard.pdf](http://www.seachoice.org/files/asset/file/37/SeaChoice_Alertcard.pdf))

## RESOURCES

### Food wastage

[www.thestar.com/News/Ideas/article/429617](http://www.thestar.com/News/Ideas/article/429617)

<http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>

### Food facts

[http://www.davidsuzuki.org/NatureChallenge/What\\_is\\_it/Food/Food\\_facts.asp](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/NatureChallenge/What_is_it/Food/Food_facts.asp)

Organic food/local food information—

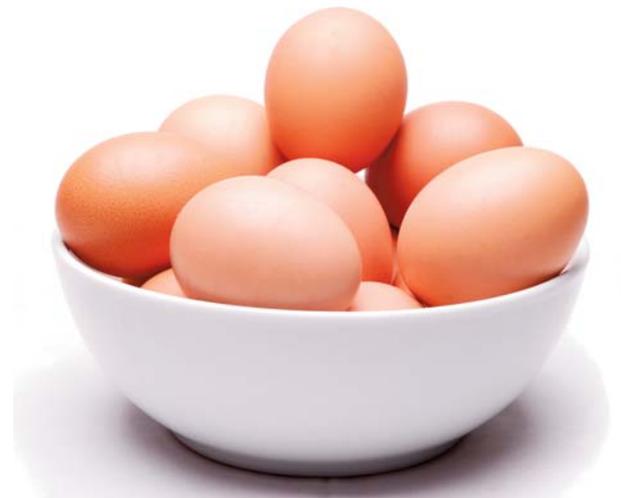
<http://www.observer.com/2008/environmental-benefits-organic-and-local-food>

## DID YOU KNOW?

Twenty-seven percent of the food produced for human consumption in the U.S. is thrown out as waste. Food waste decays in landfills and produces methane, a greenhouse gas that is 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. (Source: Stanford University)

If we all stop wasting food that could have been eaten, the CO<sub>2</sub> impact would be the equivalent of taking 1 in every 5 cars off the road (Source: Love Food Hate Waste)

Canadians eat more than twice as much meat as the global average and three times the amount recommended by the World Cancer Research Fund. (Source: David Suzuki Foundation)



# WATER

**W**ater is humanity's most valuable resource and is commonly taken for granted in Canada. There is an increasing trend toward commercialization of water in Ontario with bottled-water companies mining our aquifers. When you consider the significant environmental cost, water conservation is an area where we could have a measurable impact.

## CHECKLIST

- Install water saving toilets and aerators on faucets at district offices.
- Find and fix leaks, running toilets, and dripping faucets and showerheads.
- Install filters on taps rather than buying the large water-cooler sized bottles. This saves money and reduces the environmental costs associated with producing the bottles and transporting water.
- Use re-usable water bottles rather than plastic disposable bottles.
- Encourage attendees of meetings to bring their own reusable coffee mugs and containers. Consider providing these items for participants.
- Provide drinking glasses and water in jugs for meetings.
- Install rain barrels to collect rain water for watering plants and gardens.

## RESOURCES

### Reasons to avoid bottled water

<http://lighterfootstep.com/2008/05/five-reasons-not-to-drink-bottled-water/>

[http://www.sierraclub.org/committees/cac/water/bottled\\_water/](http://www.sierraclub.org/committees/cac/water/bottled_water/)

### Easy ways to reduce water use

<http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/pubs/simplesteps.htm>

<http://www.aboutmyplanet.com/environment/reduce-water-money/>

## DID YOU KNOW?

Water use in the 20th century has increased more than six fold, and continues to increase about twice as fast as the human population is increasing. (Source: Food and Water Watch)

A child born in the developed world consumes thirty to fifty times the water resources that a child in the developing world consumes. (Source: Sierra Club)

By giving your bathroom a water makeover with water efficient toilets and faucets, you could save more than 45,000 litres annually. (Source: US Environmental Protection Agency)



# MEETINGS & CONFERENCES

**M**any of the environmental problems faced by anyone organizing an OSSTF/FEESO event, such as a meeting or a convention, are the same as those faced in the operation of District Offices. Issues such as transportation, water, food and paper use are magnified by the increased number of people and the use of outside companies and agencies. However, there is an opportunity for the Federation, at provincial and district levels, to influence suppliers to be greener.

## CHECKLIST

- A quick scan of the checklists of other sections of this report will show that recommendations found throughout this report can easily relate to greening meetings and conferences.
- Plan meetings in a central location or near public transportation.
- Ensure that gifts or handouts are environmentally friendly and useful.
- Publicize the fact that your meetings are green, and be prepared to share your learning.
- Provide reports or other materials on USB flash drives and encourage the use of personal laptops. Only print what is necessary for the meeting. Selective use of an LCD projector can help, too.
- Reuse or recycle name tags, binders, pens and other materials from each meeting. Share with other groups (e.g., Labour Council).
- Consider holding meetings by tele- or video-conferencing. This would avoid travel and the associated environmental and financial costs.
- Appoint a specific executive or committee member to be responsible for greening your meetings.
- Add 'green' responsibility statements to your constitution's executive duties, e.g. It is the duty of the District and Bargaining Unit executive to ensure that when organizing meetings, every effort will be made to minimize the environmental impact.
- Prepare a set of questions to ask hotels, caterers, restaurants, etc. to determine the extent to which they are able to service your meetings in a way that meets your green objectives. Sample questionnaires can be found at [www.greeninggovernment.gc.ca](http://www.greeninggovernment.gc.ca) (Green meeting guide)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Organizing a green meeting is not just the right thing to do. It can also save your District or Bargaining Unit money. Something as simple as collecting and reusing name card holders for an event of 1300 attendees can save \$975 (US) per meeting. (Source: The Convention Industry Council)

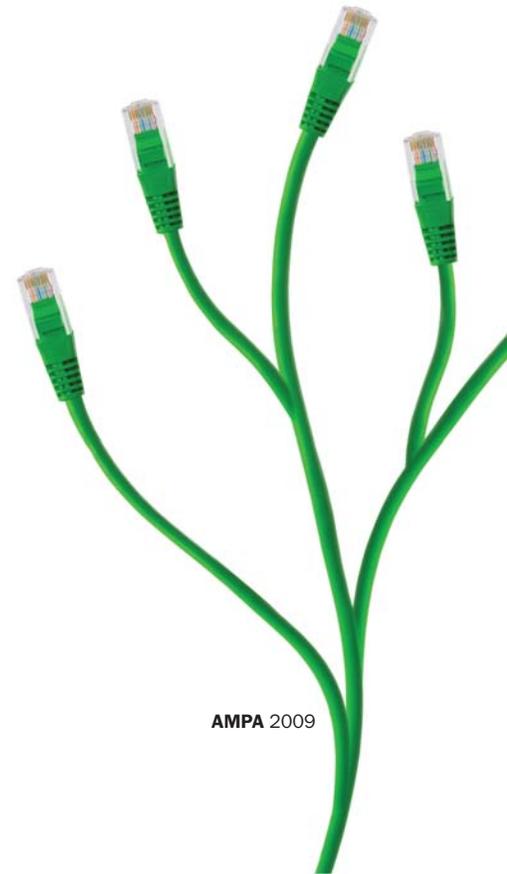
## RESOURCES

Environment Canada's Green Meeting Environment Canada's Green Meeting Guide  
[http://www.greeninggovernment.gc.ca/f5b1c0bc-741c-4493-b4b7-b0d56bbe6566/green\\_meeting\\_guide\\_07.pdf](http://www.greeninggovernment.gc.ca/f5b1c0bc-741c-4493-b4b7-b0d56bbe6566/green_meeting_guide_07.pdf)

**Excerpt:** *What is a Green Meeting? A green meeting ensures that all aspects of an event, including its location, food services, transportation and the provision of materials are approached with pollution prevention in mind in order to reduce its environmental impact.*

Green Your Conference—[www.greenyour.com/office/office-operations/conference](http://www.greenyour.com/office/office-operations/conference)

To arrange conference calls: [www.bell.ca/conferencing](http://www.bell.ca/conferencing) or 1-800-667-3678



# TRANSPORTATION

**O**ntario is a huge province and many of our Districts cover a significant geographic area. This makes our transportation choices one of the most important things to consider when trying to minimize our environmental impact (and reduce costs). The good news is, with an increasing number of choices in the auto industry and the increasing consumer desire to purchase hybrids and other eco-conscious vehicles, the options have never been greater.

## CHECKLIST

- Longer trips should continue to be planned in conjunction with other events in order to minimize travel time and fuel consumption.
- Offer carpool rates to conferences and meetings.
- At Federation-owned offices, provide special parking spots to those who carpool or drive hybrid vehicles, to provide a perk for those who have made a positive environmental choice.
- When offering events in urban areas, free transit tickets, tokens or passes could be provided upon request to all attendees. Giving week-long transit passes would also encourage travel to meals or social functions without the use of vehicles, and would provide an opportunity to explore the city.
- Provide a mass transit option (bus or vans) to take a number of participants from a central location to a meeting or a rally. The savings in mileage costs will more than offset the cost of the rental, and the environmental impact will be significantly reduced.
- When looking for an office space, consider locating near public transit.
- When possible, consider choosing a vehicle that is easy on gas, with low emissions. This information is readily available and constantly updated at <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/personal-vehicles-initiative.cfm>. This would be a painless way to begin the process of limiting our emissions and conserving gas.
- OSSTF/FEESO members should consider using rail for long trips for OSSTF business. VIA Rail and GO Transit all offer reasonable rates and multiple trip passes that would be cost effective while eliminating cars from our highways. The train allows members to work on the way to and from meetings. More information can be found at [www.viarail.ca](http://www.viarail.ca).
- Members in large urban centers should be encouraged to use one of the many car share programs. One such organization is [www.autoshare.com](http://www.autoshare.com).
- At large meetings, everyone who carpools could be entered into a draw for a green-themed prize as a means of providing an extra incentive and showcasing the priorities of the organization
- OSSTF/FEESO buildings could have bicycle racks (and shower facilities if possible).

## DID YOU KNOW?

Transportation is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activity. Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) projects that greenhouse gas emissions from Canadian transportation will rise 52 percent between 1991 and 2020.

Per capita emissions of greenhouse gases from transportation in Canada and the U.S. are approximately three times the average in other countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

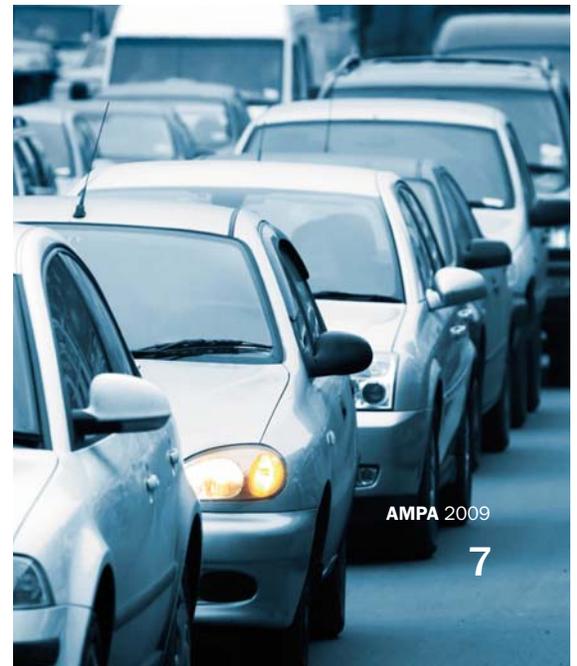
Transportation has become environmentally, socially and economically unsustainable.

## RESOURCES

Train schedule—[www.viarail.com](http://www.viarail.com)

Auto share—[www.autoshare.com](http://www.autoshare.com)

Energy efficient vehicles—  
[www.greenchoices.org](http://www.greenchoices.org)



# GREEN CLEANING SUPPLIES

**O**ur offices and homes often have a collection of toxic substances that can have a detrimental effect on our health and wellbeing. Ironically, our quest to make our workplace clean can often pollute our environment and compromise our health. Fortunately, we can meet most of our cleaning needs with simple and natural products.

## CHECKLIST

- Consider using homemade, natural cleaning products. This will save you money, while exposing you to fewer toxins and reduce the amount of harmful chemicals released into the environment. A full list of homemade cleaning products for every room can be found at [www.greenclean-toronto.com](http://www.greenclean-toronto.com)
- If you purchase cleaning products, only buy those that are certified ecologically friendly or that minimize the release of phosphate. Most stores now carry such products and a full list can be found at [www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org).
- Never underestimate the power of elbow grease. Sweat is not toxic and shedding a little, instead of choosing the easier but less environmentally friendly option, is a far better choice.
- Try to buy concentrated cleaning products that come in reusable or recyclable containers.
- If you must use a chemical product, make sure that you have proper ventilation and personal protection; dispose of effluent in a safe way and not simply down drains. Remember that waste water eventually finds a path to our lakes and rivers.
- If you use a cleaning service, ask about their environmental practices. If needed, encourage better practices, and be prepared to find a new service.

## RESOURCES

Green cleaners—[www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org)

Homemade cleaners—[www.greencleantoronto.com](http://www.greencleantoronto.com)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Within 26 seconds after exposure to chemicals, they can be found in every organ in the body.

The toxins found in common household cleaners, often dispersed in fumes, are three times more likely to cause cancer than are other air pollutants. (Source: EPA 1989)

A report by the Consumer Product Safety Commission found that 150 chemicals commonly found in homes have been linked to allergies, birth defects, breast cancer, testicular cancer, prostate cancer, declining sperm counts and psychological abnormalities.



# RECYCLING ELECTRONICS

**W**hen chemicals from electronics and batteries are dumped into the landfills they are very easily released into the environment. To prevent this from happening, batteries and electronics (e-waste) must be properly disposed. There are many companies that recycle e-waste by refurbishing or reusing it, or by recovering materials such as steel, glass, aluminum and plastic.

## CHECKLIST

- The following items are a few examples of what can and should be recycled.
  - ✓ IT equipment: Computer drives, keyboards, mouse, photocopiers, monitors, computers, printers, scanners, calculators, etc.
  - ✓ Telecommunications equipment: Fax machines, modems, pagers, telephones, routers, etc.
  - ✓ Audio visual equipment: Receivers, amplifiers, CD players, cameras, radios, VCR/DVD players, etc.
  - ✓ Small household appliances (also common in small offices): Blenders, can openers, clocks, coffee grinders and makers, etc
  - ✓ Batteries: UPS batteries, car batteries, laptop, cell phone batteries.
  - ✓ Fluorescent lamps: 2'-8' fluorescent lamps, compact fluorescents, U-Tubes, etc.
  - ✓ Cell Phones
- Repair when possible.
- Encourage vendors to introduce a take-back or recycling program.
- Donate old equipment.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Electronics contain hazardous materials such as lead, mercury, phosphorous, cadmium and barium. (Source: ADL Process Inc.)

Alkaline batteries contain potassium hydroxide, which is corrosive and can burn if exposed to wet skin. (Source: cbc/market-place)



## RESOURCES

Please note that there may be a charge, depending on the recycling company you use.

For additional information on electronics recycling in your community, and on pick up and drop off centres closest to you, please contact your local municipality. Check local municipal websites for local suggestions: search by keywords “e-waste”, “electronics recycling”, “electronic waste.”

Computers for Schools (Different locations in Ontario)

<http://cfs-ope.ic.gc.ca>

E Waste Recycling (Different locations in Ontario)—[www.RCTO.ca](http://www.RCTO.ca)

Electronic Recycling Association (Toronto) <http://www.era.ca/> —Will pick up.

# PLANTS IN YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

**G**reen, healthy environments are basic to all human life. As a large organization, OSSTF/FEESO owns and operates many buildings throughout the province. We need to improve our workplaces in ways that reduce our environmental footprint and enhance both our health and our productivity. We need to consider both indoors and outdoors. Several easy steps can be taken.

## Outdoor plants: Xeriscaping gardens

Water is swiftly becoming a resource which we will need to conserve, yet most Canadians over-water their lawns. Xeriscaping can reduce landscape water use by 50%. As well, less maintenance is needed in the way of fertilizers or pesticides. Generally, most people are used to seeing a green lawn with plants huddled around the building. A total mind adjustment is required. Grass by definition requires watering, fertilizing and cutting. Grass provides no habitat and takes up a large amount of resources. We can change to native plants and decrease the resources required to maintain the naturalized area and improve the habitat at the same time.

- Optimally, water the lawn between 7 and 10 A.M.
- Plant ecofriendly grass which can be purchased through your local garden store.
- Replant the yard to remove all the grass and replace it with native plants.

## Outdoor plants: Lawns and Gardens in general

- Use water barrels to decrease water consumption especially when watering the lawn and gardens. The new designs have screens to prevent mosquito infestation as well as taps to facilitate use.
- Switch to automatic watering—there are a number of devices now available. This reduces workload and can save water.
- Plant gardens with indigenous and drought-resistant plants to promote a healthy local ecosystem.
- Replace lawns with a variety of native species to provide both beauty and habitat.
- Switch any remaining grass to the new versions of ECO-lawn, which is drought and pest resistant and requires minimal cutting.
- Don't use pesticides or herbicides, as the pesticides will affect the health of workers and the local ecosystem, including the nearest water source.
- Switch to automatic watering—there are a number of devices now available. This reduces workload and can save water.

## RESOURCES

<http://www.nativeplants.ca/>

[www.water4tomorrow.com/NewFiles/BeautifullyParched.pdf](http://www.water4tomorrow.com/NewFiles/BeautifullyParched.pdf)

michelle.barracough@tel.tdsb.on.ca (Michelle, the author of this section of the report, teaches in District 12, and has offered to be a contact for those wanting advice on xeriscaping.)

<http://www.eco-lawn.com>

Evergreen Native Plant Database—[www.evergreen.ca/nativeplants](http://www.evergreen.ca/nativeplants)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Numerous studies conducted by the EPA over the last 25 years have shown measurable levels of over 107 known cancer causing agents in modern homes and offices.

Look around your home or office: a new desk, carpets and other items can help in making you “sick”. Plants may prove to be one of the answers to assist you in feeling better. (Source: <http://www.plant-care.com/sick-building-syndrome.html>)

Two indoor plants absorb common indoor pollutants and bacteria or 100 sq ft. Plants reduce dust by 20%, and produce oxygen. (Source: Environmental Earth Angels)

# PLANTS IN YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

## Indoor plants

Indoor plants are responsible for cleaning the air in any space. Any office with sick air syndrome or workers who experience respiratory illness may want to consider introducing plants into the work place.

- Introduce a few plants at a time. The plants should be fertilized at least once a month, and the soil should be replaced once a year.
- The key to success is to start with a small number of plants and gradually increase. One of the easiest plants to work with are spider plants.
- If there are no windows, choose plants that tolerate low and artificial light.

## Green Roofs

Green roofs allow you to create wildlife corridors in the urban landscape by providing local plantings and habitat needed for pollinators and wildlife. They also provide a way to decrease storm water run off into the sewage system. An additional advantage is the insulation effect of the roof in all seasons.

## Living Walls

Living walls in offices improve air quality, help with carbon dioxide/oxygen exchange, worker health and the general quality of the environment. In living walls, the air passes over both lava rock and water, absorbing common indoor pollutants, bacteria, viruses and fungi and reducing dust by up to 20 percent. Additionally, they produce oxygen. Aesthetically, they have a calming, peaceful effect that improves worker performance. Put in a living wall if you have dry air in the building. It will provide cleaner air and an aesthetically pleasing area in which to work and relax.

## RESOURCES

<http://easywaystogogreen.com/green-homes/environmentally-friendly-house-plants/>  
<http://www.loe.org/favorites/plants.htm>  
<http://www.agrihortico.com/page.php?183>  
<http://www.plant-care.com/sick-building-syndrome.html>

## RESOURCES

<http://www.greenroofs.com/>  
<http://www.bioroof.com/contact.html>

## RESOURCES

<http://www.breathingwall.com/video.htm>



# COMPOSTING

**D**iverting kitchen and yard waste from District and Bargaining Unit functions saves landfill, reduces energy costs of transporting waste, and creates a product which will help your lawn or garden. All three methods described below will require OSSTF/FEESO members to sort their waste. Green bins would be needed for meeting rooms and/or kitchens. Pick the method which works best for you.

## CHECKLIST

- Determine which of the following three methods works best at your work-site (details follow). You may decide to use a combination of the three.
  - ✓ Create and maintain your own compost heap
  - ✓ Use indoor vermicomposting
  - ✓ Use municipal composting
- If you have no place on-site to use the compost, offer it up for free to members or through local community organizations.
- Work with any property-care or food services you use to have them support your composting objectives.
- The resulting compost can simply be spread over an existing lawn or garden.



### Create and maintain your own compost heap

This is the best choice for any building with a yard. Do a bit of reading to determine the best location for your compost heap or bin.

Make your own container; many are also available commercially, often with a government subsidy. If you have a big yard, a pile in a far corner will work too. Add kitchen scraps to the heap or bin, usually in alternating layers with soil or yard waste (leaves & grass clippings). Given enough time, the contents decompose into “black gold”. Turn the pile regularly to significantly speed up the process.

### Use Indoor vermicomposting

This is the best choice if your District and Bargaining Unit offices are in an urban or strip-mall location, or are without access to a yard, or in a community with nuisance bears. It is also a good choice for people who do not like walking to the compost heap in the winter.

Vermicomposting means composting with worms. You will need a box with a lid and some airflow, bedding (sand, peat moss, shredded paper are good choices) and worms. You can make your own, or use one of the commercially-available kits. Add kitchen scraps as they become available. Once the consistency of the bedding has changed to “castings”, just separate out the worms (there are several simple techniques where you won’t have to touch them), add new bedding, and start all over. Red wigglers are the best type of worms. They can be purchased. Ideally, get the worms from someone who already has a vermicomposter. Worm populations automatically adjust to the amount of food available so you’ll never run out by giving some to friends.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Composting is nature's way to recycle!

Up to 50% of Canada's waste stream can be composted. (Source: Composting Council of Canada)

Organics do NOT decompose in regular landfills because they lack the necessary oxygen and microbes.

# COMPOSTING

## Use Municipal composting

This is the best choice for those unable to use either of the above choices, and for items that are unsuitable for personal composting (meat scraps, feminine hygiene products etc). Know your municipality's rules regarding which items are included, pick up schedules etc. Check your municipality's website. If there is currently no municipal service in your area, consider lobbying to get one started.



## RESOURCES

Your municipal website will probably have a section on composting, and may provide incentives/rebates for compost/vermicompost bins. It may also list local stores which sell supplies. Vermicomposting is a bit of a cottage industry, so ask around at natural foods stores, independent bookstores and coffee shops, etc. Many conservation authorities and municipalities also run workshops on composting. (If your municipal site has not yet included composting, browse through other municipal sites. There is a HUGE amount of “how-to” information).

Environment Ontario—

[www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/myenvironment/home/householdwaste.php](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/myenvironment/home/householdwaste.php)  
#compost

Recycling Council of Ontario—<http://www.rco.on.ca/>

# CARBON CREDITS

**To** buy or not to buy, that is the question. Carbon credits, that is. Carbon credits are a way to compensate for greenhouse gases that we cannot yet eliminate.

## CHECKLIST

- Use an online calculator to estimate your District or Bargaining Unit's carbon footprint. See resources below.
- Begin to change practices, using techniques suggested in this Report and elsewhere, to reduce the overall carbon footprint
- Establish a budget line to purchase carbon credits to offset the rest.

There is considerable discussion about carbon credits. This section will explain what they are and when they are appropriate. "Carbon" is simply short for "greenhouse gases", which are human-produced greenhouse gases contain carbon.

### What are carbon credits?

The overall goal is to become carbon neutral, so that our net direct and indirect production of greenhouse gases is zero. This is done in three stages: measuring our production, reducing as much as possible, and then offsetting the rest by purchasing carbon credits. It is a repeated process, resulting in annual reductions in net emissions. Carbon credits, often called carbon offsets, are simply a way of offsetting emissions of greenhouse gases that cannot be avoided. This is done by calculating our extra carbon output and then paying another organization to do something that will either absorb, or prevent the production of, an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases.

Carbon credits are not a cop-out; they are a way of dealing with excess carbon emissions that we cannot find another way to eliminate.

Here is an example:

Your District Executive Officer drives 500 km for meetings that cannot be covered by tele- or video-conferencing. You go to the calculator at CarbonZero.ca (others are found below) and determine that the trips in her small car produced 0.12 tonnes of greenhouse gases. Going through the website's checkout procedure will allow you to buy a calculated amount of carbon credits. That money would then be spent on one of CarbonZero's projects, such as a wind farm, a solar-power installation, or a major insulation and heat-recovery upgrade for subsidized housing. As with any reputable source of carbon credits, all their projects are certified.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Currently, atmospheric scientists estimate that we are within a decade of runaway climate change, if we fail to make permanent and absolute reductions in the levels of greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere.

Studies of ice cores from the Antarctic show that there is now more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than there has been in at least 800,000 years. Human activities are responsible for the increase. The same studies, and others, show a parallel rise in global temperatures.

Carbon Credits are a valid way to offset the part of our carbon emissions we can't eliminate, yet.

Money paid to purchase carbon credits can be directed to socially active projects. There are online calculators to help you calculate your carbon emissions and buy credits.

# CARBON CREDITS

## Where does our carbon-offset money go?

Good carbon credit retailers will tell you where the money goes, and will often give you a choice of what project to support. Many, including The David Suzuki Foundation and CarbonZero, have a focus on socially active projects, such as upgrading and greening heating and energy systems in public housing. Tree planting is no longer considered to be a viable way to do carbon offsets. Past tree-planting projects have caused problems, such as introducing exotic species of trees and pests, and displacing indigenous peoples. Alternative energy projects are preferred, as they also reduce our dependence on gas, oil and coal.

## Different standards of carbon credits

There are several recognized standards you should look for, including VCS (Voluntary Carbon Standard), Green-e, and the Gold Standard. There are also various provincial standards. Some carbon credit retailers support projects meeting several of these standards; others adhere to only one.

## RESOURCES

The David Suzuki Foundation, specifically:

[www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate\\_Change/What\\_You\\_Can\\_Do/carbon\\_neutral.asp](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/What_You_Can_Do/carbon_neutral.asp)

[www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate\\_Change/What\\_You\\_Can\\_Do/carbon\\_offsets.asp](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/What_You_Can_Do/carbon_offsets.asp)

These pages give a great overview of the concepts, some caveats, and questions to ask a carbon credit seller.

CarbonZero — <http://www.carbonzero.ca> — is an Ontario-based company, with a site that has calculators based on Canadian assumptions, and a means to purchase credits online.

Carbon Footprint Offsetters — <http://www.offsetco2.ca> — uses the same calculators as CarbonZero, but uses its money on different projects and has different pricing.

