

# Green Scene: What Will Be Your Climate Action This Summer?

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[photograph]

[caption: Purchasing carbon credits should not result in the logging of a healthy young forest, as did this project in Maple Ridge.

Sheryl Seale photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: What will your climate action be this summer?]

With the provincial government ready to apply a carbon tax on gasoline and send every BC resident a Climate Action Dividend cheque next month, we should be getting the clear message we must make changes in personal activities that contribute to global warming. Canadians are among the highest per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters in the world; we produce 21.5 tonnes per capita, a rate that has increased 27% since 1990. In contrast, people in Great Britain produce 10 tonnes per capita and have reduced their rate by 14.2 percent since 1990. Thus, we have considerable room – and reason – to lower our emissions.

An inexpensive but fairly effective way to start to reduce emissions is to change personal habits. While turning off lights and shutting computers down when not in use are good conservation initiatives for other reasons, such efforts will have only limited impacts on GHG emissions in BC because over 90% of our electricity comes from hydroelectric sources. If your home is heated by gas or oil, then turning the thermostat down will help to reduce emissions. However, with summer approaching, furnaces are unlikely to be in operation over the next few months. Save this initiative for the fall.

Approximately 40% of BC's GHG emissions come from transportation; in addition, another 18% is generated through fossil fuel production. Thus, reducing consumption of fossil fuels, especially through less driving, is likely the most effective way to reduce personal GHG emissions. In particular, the summer months are an excellent time to walk or cycle to destinations or make more frequent use of public transit. If driving is really the only option, seek opportunities to carpool or combine errands. Switching to a more fuel-efficient vehicle is a great idea but may not be financially feasible over the short term. Certainly, that \$100 cheque won't contribute much towards the cost of a vehicle but you could purchase quite a few transit tickets with it...or, perhaps, a second-hand bike.

Remember that all plastics are derived from fossil fuels so do whatever you can to reduce your use of them. Carry re-usable cloth bags when shopping and avoid the purchase of single-use or non-recyclable plastic products. Every summer, our northern boreal forests absorb vast quantities of carbon dioxide from the air and store it in the form of wood which is approximately 50% carbon. Despite their immense value in stabilizing our climate, these forests continue to be cut down for facial tissue, toilet paper and paper towels - all of which are available made from recycled fibre. Change your buying habits to save our boreal forests; as a bonus you will be helping to preserve wildlife habitat.

With summer comes the time for vacations. Perhaps this is the time to plan a holiday closer to home and explore more of beautiful BC. Air travel remains one of the most problematic of GHG sources. To reach some destinations, there are essentially no other options apart from air travel. What's worse, for a number of reasons, high altitude emissions are approximately three times more harmful than land-level carbon dioxide emissions. Air travellers have been recommended to offset their emissions by purchasing "carbon credits", i.e., paying for programs that support carbon storage or reduce other GHG emissions. Such carbon credit programs should be investigated to ensure they actually accomplish their goals.

One such program in Maple Ridge was designed to provide carbon credits by covering the cost of planting trees in protected areas. Trees absorb carbon dioxide as they grow and can be excellent carbon reservoirs. However, in this particular program, a healthy riparian forest of red alder was logged to create space to plant conifers. In addition to destroying a valuable young forest next to a stream, this program ignored basic biology: red alders enrich the soil through nitrogen fixation and, thus, ensure the coniferous trees that naturally replace them over time will grow under more fertile conditions. Logging the alders interrupted this beneficial cycle. The David Suzuki Foundation recommends people who wish to purchase carbon credits avoid tree-planting programs in general. Their website ([www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)) lists a number of recommended options for purchasing carbon credits to offset air travel. Obviously, there are a number of simple things we can start to do right now to reduce our GHG emissions. The important thing is that we all get started.