

Taking the Challenge

"It is in cities that the battle to tackle climate change will be won or lost," London Mayor Ken Livingstone

Alliance quietly became part of an international movement last week, joining a host of cities such as Bangkok, London, Cairo, New York City, Toronto, Mexico City, Berlin, and Tokyo, to name just a few. On May 7th, our City Council unanimously sponsored and passed a resolution endorsing the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. By doing so, we have joined with over 500 United States cities, and an international network of cities who are acting now to address global warming while their countries' governments sort out global agreements.

Listen to what these city leaders have to say:

"Where national governments can't or won't lead, cities will," Toronto Mayor David Miller

"As cities produce three-fourths of the carbon emissions, we must act... Whatever the discussions within our governments, as cities we are not waiting," London Mayor Ken Livingstone

"We cannot sit around and watch our environment deteriorate and put this world in jeopardy," Michael Bloomberg, NYC Mayor

Now Alliance is joining the effort. Bravo!

Alliance is endorsing the goal of reducing its emissions below 1990 levels by 2012. While the city finds solutions for its buildings and fleets to achieve this goal, you and I can take action on our piece of the challenge immediately. How about reducing your energy use by 25%? In a month's time, you can be paying approximately 25% less on your electric bill. That means a quarter less carbon dioxide from electricity production for your household. Does it sound unlikely? It's not. At our house, we've reduced our electricity use by an average of 28% per month over the last eight months.

We started with the easy stuff.

We have installed fluorescent bulbs almost everywhere. We've found that they're often an improvement over incandescent bulbs, if you get the right bulb for the right job. They're also getting easier to find, and come in nearly every size, shape and brightness: both "soft," which is a warm, dimmer, yellow color like an incandescent, and "bright," or "craft," which are like sunlight – a bright, full-spectrum light which shows off colors beautifully. Look for the Energy Star label for quality assurance.

We also lowered the thermostat a few more degrees on winter nights, and put up cellular blinds to insulate our windows on cold nights. We are line and rack-drying laundry on the back deck, or in the basement (when we aren't in desperate need of dry socks!). To speed the process in cool weather, I'll sometimes run the dryer on the "damp dry" setting before hanging the laundry, to give it a jump-start. When we replace the dryer, we'll buy an Energy Star unit.

We are being more careful about only using the lights we really need, and turning off any technology not in use (the computer must be set on "sleep" when we step away, and definitely shut down when not in use; battery chargers are unplugged when not in use).

These measures have dropped our electricity use by about 28% compared with last year. Our family is feeling a little more hopeful about our ability to deal with global warming, and we're enjoying the lower electric bill. Now that we've achieved the 25% goal for home energy efficiency with so little effort, we're wondering how low we can go! The U.S. Conference of Mayors and the American Institute of Architects have set a goal of reaching a 50% fossil fuel reduction by 2010 and carbon neutral buildings by 2030. I would like to make that our family's goal as well. If we can reach that golden 50% reduction in energy use, then it will be more feasible to use renewable energy to provide the remaining power we need.

Our next step will be to find the best way to upgrade our windows and further insulate our old walls, and to exchange some of our appliances for Energy Star alternatives while those tax incentives are still in place. My achievement last week – installing foam pads under the light switches and receptacle plates on our exterior walls, to block air leaks. It cost about \$3, and ten minutes. We also invested in a solar pond pump to replace a plug-in pump – so we have a fountain when the sun shines (with a larger investment, we could have purchased a battery backup for cloudy days).

This summer, we'll try harder to tough-out the hot weather with fans instead of air conditioning (this is my personal weak spot)...or at least set the thermostat several degrees higher, or only use it for a bit to cool the house before we go to sleep. I'm hoping that the improved insulation and cooler fluorescent bulbs will make it a little easier to beat the heat. We plan to plant shade trees on the south side of our house to help in the long run.

A 25% reduction in energy use is a goal we all can meet, and it's a piece of our city's goal for the community under the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement – are you up for the challenge? How low can *you* go? See the Energy Star websites below for more energy saving ideas for your home and business.

Check it out:

Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement:

<http://www.usmayors.org/climateprotection/>

For a map of cities who have signed the Agreement, and more info:

<http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/climate/>

Info on Compact Fluorescent light bulbs (CFL's), including disposal/recycling:

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

Find the right compact fluorescent for you:

<http://www.environmentaldefense.org/page.cfm?tagID=632>

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=cfls.advanced_cfl_search

Energy Efficiency for Homes:

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.es_at_home

Energy Efficiency for: Government, Healthcare, Higher Education, Large and Small Businesses, Congregations, K-12 Schools, Restaurants, Hotels, Industrial Plants, Real Estate, etc.

See links in sidebar at: http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=business.bus_index