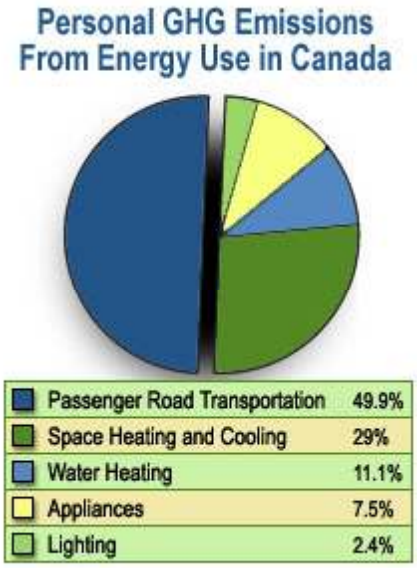
Taking Action

We all contribute to creating the Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) that are causing climate change. In fact, the actions of individual Canadians account for about 28% of Canada's total GHG emissions. That is almost 6 tonnes per person per year – enough to fill 6 two-story houses. Every time we turn on a light, hop in a car, start up a computer, or do anything that uses energy from fossil fuels, we are responsible for producing GHG. But as part of the problem, we can also be part of the solution.

Figure 1. Personal Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Energy Use in Canada



Source: http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/onetonne/english/about.asp

There are lots of simple things we can do, as part of our everyday lives, to reduce our GHG emissions. The bonus is that many of these things will also save us money, make us healthier and fitter, and improve air quality. It is all about setting a goal, having a plan and making wise, informed choices. You can start by calculating your GHG emissions and exploring how you can reduce them using http://www.onelesstonne.ca/.

On the road

For most Canadians, driving accounts for about one-half of their GHG emissions. The solutions?

- Drive less: walk, bike, take public transit, carpool. Shop and choose activities close to home. Combine your errands so they only take one trip. Declare a "car-free" day.
- If you choose to buy a car, choose a fuel efficient vehicle and use gas blended with ethanol. Or consider joining a car share co-op. Check out http://www.victoriacarshare.ca/ and and http://www.nelsoncar.com/ for more information.
- Switching from a car to a bike or the bus just 3 days a week would cut your emissions by about half a tonne.

See Backgrounder on Transportation for more tips on reducing GHG emissions from driving.

At Home

For most Canadians, home heating and cooling account for about one-third of GHG emissions. Heating water accounts for about 11%, appliances 7.5% and lighting 2.4%. Take action – reduce consumption!

Appliances

- Use the microwave, kettle, or toaster oven instead of the stove.
- Avoid putting hot food directly into the refrigerator and freezer.
- Ensure the dishwasher is full before running it, and use the air-drying option.

Water heating

- Take a quick shower instead of a bath (a five-minute shower uses up to 50% less hot water than a bath).
- Use the warm or cold setting to wash your clothes (heating the water accounts for about 90% of the energy used when you do a load of laundry).
- Select the right size setting for the amount of clothes you are washing (don't wash partial loads).
- Use a clothesline (or a drying rack set up inside) – great in the dry winter months for putting some moisture into the air. If you have to use a dryer, use a low heat setting and don't overdry your clothes.

Home heating/cooling

- Turn down the thermostat. Layer on more clothes and wear a sweater!
- Turn down the air conditioner. For each degree set below 24°C you use 3% to 5% more energy. To keep cool, use the ceiling fan and keep blinds and curtains closed during the day in the summer. (A ceiling fan costs between 8¢ and $1.50/month, while an air conditioner can cost between $6.75 and $40.50 /month).
- Plant trees around the house especially on the sun exposed south or west facing sides to produce shade and help keep the house cool.

Lighting

- Turn off the lights *every* time you leave a room for more than five minutes.
- Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs (they use 75% less energy and last 10 times longer than incandescent light bulbs). 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 (same as removing 66,000 cars from the road).

Electronics

- Buy energy-efficient electronics (look for the"Energystar" logo).
- Activate the energy saving features on your computer.
- Use a laptop instead of a desktop computer.
- Turn off stereos, DVDs, televisions, and computers completely when you are not using them (unplug them or switch off the power bar). Electronic equipment and appliances (including cell phone chargers) use energy even when they are in stand-by mode (to maintain memory functions like the clock…do you really need 10 clocks in your house?). Standby power could account for as much as 10 percent of total electricity use in industrial countries by 2020.

Mowing the lawn

- Make sure the lawn mower is well maintained, don't idle, don't run at full throttle, mow less frequently. Depending on the year, make and model, lawnmowers emit as much pollution in one hour as driving a car 30-300 km.
- Better yet – use a push mower. It is less smelly, less noisy and you get fit at the same time!

At Play

- Declare a TV/DVD/internet free day once a week.
- Choose activities close to home so that you can walk or bike to them.
- Switch to 4-stroke engines (for outboard motors, snowmobiles, jet-skis, light motorcycles). Two-stroke engines dump litres of unused fuel into the water or ground every time they're used.
- Better yet – take up a human-powered sport like walking, running, biking, skiing etc.

At the Store

- Buy less stuff. Everything you buy has to be manufactured, transported, and marketed, and greenhouse gases are emitted every step of the way. Before you buy ask: "Do I really need/want it?" Frequent the second-hand stores as reusing helps reduce demand on resources and in turn GHG emissions.
- Buy better made stuff - it lasts longer.
- Buy local stuff - fewer GHG are emitted in transporting it to you.
- Buy stuff with less packaging. Think of it: all that carbon-emitting manufacturing, just to make something you'll throw away!
- Eat local and eat organic. The average meal travels about 2400 km to reach our plate. If it's a choice between local or imported organic, choose local.
- Eat less meat. It takes far more energy – not to mention land, water, and chemicals – to produce meat than it does to produce grains.
- BYOBags for your all your shopping.
- Reduce, Re-use and recycle, and compost your kitchen and yard waste – every time you don't need to purchase something new you save energy

Buying Less Stuff

Think of all the energy that goes into making and consuming our everyday products:

- energy to extract raw materials (digging up metals, chopping down trees, growing cotton, etc)…
- energy to transport them (maybe to another country)….
- energy to process them in large mechanized factories….
- energy to package them…
- energy to transport them to retailers (often on the other side of the world!)…
- energy to build malls and stores, then keep them lit and heated…
- energy to bring them to your home (usually in your single-passenger vehicle)…
- finally, energy to pick up, transport and dispose of the waste from their packaging.

Now, think of the products on the shelves of your local mall, and ask yourself how many we really need. How many get thrown out after one use? How many are worth their weight in emissions? Although cutting back on the consumer binge that has become a way of life in North America can sound, initially, self-denying and unpleasant, it can actually be quite liberating to realize how many things you don't really want and don't need to waste your money on. Committed shopaholics can have just as much fun – if not more! Money is saved and so are emissions! People all over the world celebrate Buy Nothing Day once a year; you can celebrate Buy Less Day 365 times a year!

At School

- Sign up for the Lights Off! Energy Saving Program to calculate how much energy your school uses and explore options for conserving energy and reducing. Go to http://www.greenlearning.ca/ta/lights-off.php
- Start a school recycling and composting program.
- Start an environmental club or an environmental project.
- Calculate and reduce your school's carbon footprint.
- Start an anti-idling campaign.
- Walk, bike or bus to school and get your friends to join you.
- Pack waste-free lunches. Send a letter to parents asking them to support you.
- Book an Otesha Project presentation. The Otesha Project's education programs use theatre, multi-media, and storytelling to engage audiences. They focus on re-evaluating our daily choices to reflect the kind of future we'd like to see. http://www.otesha.ca/
- Oteshafy your school! Check out http://www.otesha.ca/being+the+change/take+action/guides.en.html for more ideas.

Other Ideas

- Join the Youth Environmental Network (YEN). YEN empowers youth driven projects and supports youth working collectively to create positive change in their communities. There are five regional networks and one national network of YENGOs working on climate change issues. Check out some of the projects supported by YEN micro-grants for more ideas.
  http://www.yen-rej.org/modules/content/index.php?id=5

- Develop an action plan for your family to reduce its emissions. Calculate your family's emissions, gather information on solutions and present them to your family. Tell them why this is important to you. Then make decisions together about what actions your family will implement.
- Talk to your friends, parents, teachers, neighbours. Influence them to change by telling them why it is important to you and what actions you are taking.
- Go carbon neutral. It is impossible to reduce our carbon emissions to zero, no matter how hard we try. Reduce your emissions as much as you can and then purchase carbon offsets for the rest. Or you can choose to offset specific items, like air or car travel. The money is invested in renewable energy and other projects that reduce global CO2 emissions. Check out http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/What_You_Can_Do/carbon_neutral.asp for links to sites where you can calculate your emissions and purchase offsets.

Sources and Useful Links

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