

# Help cut gas emissions



**Your Earth**

*Suzanne Elston*

Next week, the eyes of the world will be on Kyoto, Japan where the leaders of the world are gathering to hammer out a new global warming treaty. It has been five years since the Convention on Climate Change was signed in Rio. Virtually none of the participating nations has met the agreed target of freezing carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Canada, a leader at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, has done particularly poorly. Our once shining image as an environmental leader has been tarnished by our inability to get greenhouse gases under control. Canadians are currently pumping 12 per cent more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than they were five years ago.

Since we share the dubious honour of being the highest consumers of energy in the world with our neighbour to the south, both the Canadian and U.S. governments have a moral responsibility to the rest of the world to curb our energy habits. Earlier this year, President Bill Clinton vowed to commit to tough new targets but then bowed to pressure from industry. The U.S. has now agreed to commit to freezing CO2 levels to 1990 levels by the year 2010.

In response, Jean Chretien promised to show up the Americans by setting tough new targets, until he met with provincial energy ministers earlier this month. Unable to reach a consensus, Canada has only committed to the same watered-down position as the U.S.

Clinton and Chretien have bowed to pressure from mainstream economists and industry that say you can't cut greenhouse gases without hurting the economy. What we should be doing is setting aggressive targets and then applying our nations' considerable skills to meeting them. Instead, both our leaders are talking about "achievable goals" which translated means "let's pick a target that won't upset industry or require any effort."

In the middle of all of this comes a report from the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. The report states that 150 cities around the world have managed to actually cut carbon dioxide emissions between 1990 and 1996. Topping the

list was the City of Toronto. Efforts there have managed to cut emissions by 7.8 million tonnes. This puts Toronto well on its way to achieving the goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent by the year 2000.

What's remarkable about this achievement is that most of the reductions came through capturing methane gas from the city's garbage dumps and using it to make electricity. Rather than crippling local industry or destroying the economy, Toronto has managed to cut emissions while providing energy to fuel commerce.

Toronto's efforts clearly demonstrate that we're capable of significantly reducing our carbon load on the planet. What's interesting is that most of the reductions were achieved without cutting fossil fuel consumption. More importantly, it destroys the myth that reducing greenhouse gases is bad for the economy.

This is exciting, it's inspiring and it shows if you really want to make a difference you have to do it at the local level. If every municipality in Canada were to take responsibility for its own carbon dioxide emissions, rather than looking to Ottawa for leadership, we'd all breathe easier. I just hope that the nations of the world sit up and take notice when this report is presented at the Kyoto Conference on Dec. 2.

What can individuals do? Cutting greenhouse gas emissions is everyone's responsibility. Don't idle your car on cold mornings. Most manufacturers agree that a 30- to 60-second warm-up is all that's necessary for modern car engines. Approach your town council and ask that they adopt a "no idling" by-law for publicly and privately owned vehicles. Use public transit, create a car pool or find other creative ways to leave your car at home more often. As Metro Toronto proved, even using your blue box as much as possible to recycle paper can help cut greenhouse gas emissions.

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