

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

For once, government's not all wet

Rare is the occasion when politicians hang us out to dry — and we like it.

Yet that is exactly what happened this week when the province announced that come summer, no one can stop you from stringing up an outdoor clothesline in your back yard.

As we've reported, a battle broke out last summer in the region over a growing tendency among builders of new subdivisions to include a ban on pole-to-pole clotheslines in their purchase agreements. Count us squarely on the side of the outdoor laundry hangers in our community.

For one thing, there are already far too many intrusive laws, rules and regulations in our society telling people how to live their lives, even when they aren't doing anybody any harm. Telling people that they can't festoon their own back yard with their own bed sheets, towels and undies is one bridge, or rather string, too far.

As Aurora Mayor Phyllis Morris, who launched the Right to Dry campaign, rightly points out, forbidding the use of outdoor clotheslines as an alternative to indoor electric dryers flies in the face of good sense at a time of concern about energy conservation and the environment.

Clothes dryers account for an estimated 6 per cent of energy consumption in an average home, which makes no sense when

the sun and wind will do the job for free. Outdoor drying also makes it unnecessary to use those smelly fabric softener sheets which then become garbage, and it doesn't generate all that lint, which also becomes waste and which is evidence of your clothes and linens gradually being torn to shreds by dryers.

Walk through the streets of most European cities and towns — in Italy, say — and you'll find a rich display of dangling laundry of every description is a key part of the visual landscape, adding not only colour and vibrancy but an opportunity for people to chat with their neighbours about their laundering achievements and frustrations and to brighten their own conversations with commentary on the quality and style of the next-door neighbour's unmentionables.

If you ask us, those metal umbrella-type drying stands just aren't the same, and frankly they're a lot uglier when they stand empty like some very bad and sterile attempt at outdoor sculpture.

Developers should stop including this restriction in their purchase agreements. If they don't, buyers should refuse to sign until that provision is scratched out.

Municipalities have a role to play, too, by making sure restrictions on outdoor clotheslines are not included in the site plan approval process.



Environment is trendy, so let's keep it that way

If you had told me at the beginning of last year that 2007 would be the breakout year for the environment, I probably wouldn't have believed you.

Yes, 2006 had *An Inconvenient Truth*, but 2007 saw the environment become a true media darling.

As great as this has been, we mustn't forget news is a fickle beast and, by definition, "new" doesn't last very long. That means we need to keep the interest moving forward or we could lose the momentum we've built.

We've come a pretty long way in two years. In 2006, people started paying attention to the environment again.

It was like society woke up from a collective environmental slumber, looked around with bleary eyes, blinked and asked, "What's going on?" And people started to look for answers.

In 2007, the media got on board. Environmental stories made front-page news all year long. Books about the environment became best-sellers. Magazines from home design

to celebrity gossip suddenly had environment pages or "green" tips. Eco-this and Enviro-that became commonplace.

My local newspaper, the Vancouver Sun, invited me to be guest editor and has seen a newfound interest in environmental stories.

But for those of us old enough to remember back a couple decades, this might seem like déjà vu.

In the late '80s and early '90s, the environment was also a top public concern. Governments poured money into environment ministries. Corporations developed environmental stewardship platforms. Municipalities rolled out blue box recycling programs.

And the people cheered. Problem solved. Now they could go back to worrying about more manageable individual priorities such as paying bills, going to work and providing for their families.

Of course, we all know now the problem wasn't solved by a long shot. But we lost a decade of potential progress because people slipped into complacency.



David Suzuki

with Faisal Moola

And who can blame them? No one wants to deal with something as big and complicated as our global environment.

The thing is, we don't have a choice anymore. Leading scientists have been telling us for decades we are on a dangerous path.

The good news is it is not too late to change the route we are on. There are alternative ways to live that are in balance with Earth's life support systems. But getting on a new path requires real change.

So what does "real change"

mean? For governments, giving money to the Environment Ministry only to have its mandate trounced by the ministries of Natural Resources, Energy or Finance won't cut it.

For corporations, token efforts such as a "green" building design or energy-efficient lighting won't cut it if your bottom line is still profits at the expense of the environment.

For individuals, using re-usable bags instead of plastic or carrying a re-usable coffee cup will do little if you still drive to work every day.

If it sounds like a challenge, that's because it is.

Real solutions are never easy and there will be lots of arguments. We will also make mistakes. But the only real failure will be if we don't try at all.

We've only got one Earth, so we can't just wait and see what happens if we continue with business as usual. That path may look easy now, but in the near future it will make things very, very hard.

So what does this all mean?

It means it's time to dig deeper.

We already have the public's attention, but now we need to get serious about solutions. We know how hard it is to be environmentally responsible.

Many of our daily decisions are not good for the environment because they are easier and cheaper to make. Still, challenge yourself, your neighbours, your friends and co-workers to make Canada a global warming problem solver, not a problem maker.

Large-scale changes also require corporate and government leadership. But here, too, individual action can have great power.

Politicians and business leaders know the public is concerned, but they are slow to respond unless really pushed. If you really want to make a big difference in 2008, push them hard.

Real change is happening. Let our leaders know there's nothing that can stop it.

Take David Suzuki's Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org.

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