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Earth Hour: turn it down and turn it off

Today marks the fourth annual global Earth Hour event. At 8:30 pm local time, millions of people from around the world will turn off their lights for one hour to make a statement about climate change.

Earth Hour started in Sydney, Australia in 2007 when 2.2 million home and businesses turned off their lights. Last year that number grew to over 4,000 cities in 88 countries. International landmarks such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the CN Tower in Toronto, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Coliseum in Rome all went dark last year for Earth Hour. This year, the number of countries and territories has grown to an impressive 118.

This tremendous growth in Earth Hour participation reveals to me three things about humanity in 2010.

Number one – millions of us care about Mother Earth and want to do something to show it.

Number two – the power of media and social media to spread the word is amazing, we are truly a ‘small’ community of 6.5 billion people.

Number three – it takes technology, and subsequently energy, to connect all of us. Therein lies the challenge. Namely, we are using energy to share the word with the world that we are turning off energy.

Our reality is that we cannot turn off lights, appliances, computers, and heat all of the time. One hour a year is a wonderful ‘statement’, but 24/7 does not work. What to do?

On the day we celebrate Earth Hour, I suggest that you do something that could turn out to be a more long lasting expression support for reduced energy use – visit the Fredericton Home Show this weekend at the Capital Exhibit Center. There will be number of exhibitors at the Home Show with energy efficient products and services, and Efficiency New Brunswick will also be there.

While there, please find exhibitors that are showcasing heat pumps. Why? We replaced our old electric/wood furnace last year with a new Trane air-to-air heat pump. What a difference! We have saved about \$150 per month this winter relative to last winter. Yes, it will take a few years to pay off, however, the heat pump has increased the value of our home, it is saving us a few hundred dollars per year, and is reducing our carbon footprint by about 4 Tonnes per year.

There are many things you can do to lower energy costs in your home, from changing the light bulbs to insulating the basement, to turning the thermostat a bit lower in the winter. It all helps lower your energy footprint.

We live in a connected world, which requires energy. Until all of that energy runs on renewable sources such as wind and solar, we are still collectively emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Our challenge is to continually take steps to reduce our carbon footprint. Maybe we can collectively stretch Earth Hour beyond one hour per year, and celebrate an Earth Hour every month, or every week or even every day?

So, what are you waiting for this March 27, 2010 - go to the Fredericton Home Show this weekend to learn how to turn your energy down, and celebrate Earth Hour this evening by turning your energy off!

Peter Corbyn is the Special Advisor to The Climate Project Canada and co-founder of GreenNexus.