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Green Matters In Action

Fredericton's Green Matters campaign began nearly two years ago and was created with the primary focus of supporting citizens in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). This includes such things as: driving less, using less energy, generating less waste, and the list goes on. In its most altruistic terms, however, Green Matters is designed to simply motivate citizens to live greener lives for their health and the health of the planet.

The last two years have seen progressive change in our city. Increasing numbers of citizens are getting 'engaged' in environmental issues and taking action in their own lives. Some changes are very difficult to measure, but anecdotal evidence indicates that we are indeed moving ahead together with greater environmental commitment and action. And many more people are making 'green' choices more often.

There are hopeful signs everywhere. Recently I saw a group of male university students walking into Sobeys with their reusable grocery bags under their arms. I don't think we would have seen this sight two or three years ago!

The City's water utility reported less water use last summer and many witnessed less lawn watering despite the dry summer. This is progress.

Are people walking and biking more? Turning their lights and computers off and their heat down? Turning their cars off instead of idling? Reducing waste at curbside, and recycling and composting more? We can't say definitively, but we think so. If you are reading this, and determine that you are doing these things more than you did a few years ago, then we're right.

Corporate citizens are changing too. The new Green Shops program is 50 members strong and growing. These businesses are doing everything from using alternative energy to eliminating plastic bags (check them out at www.greenshopsfredericton.ca). And if they are incorporating principles of environmental stewardship into their business, most likely owners and employees are taking these actions home too. So it's clear that businesses in Fredericton are doing business 'greener' than they did a few years ago too.

It is true that citizens look to their municipal government to lead any sort of change like this. Our City is striving to provide such leadership. However, change at the local government level cannot be as quick and immediately obvious as change at the grassroots. In order for new environmental policies and actions, regulations, and bylaws to be successful, there must be a long-term, sustainable and planned approach which accounts for practical factors such as: the cost of implementation and ongoing delivery (e.g. enforcement); process changes within departments; and often changes to equipment and materials that must happen in a staged manner. It's not always obvious, but this is in fact happening in Fredericton

despite the typical bumps in the road that accompany any kind of change this big. And environmental commitment in our City government is getting stronger with each passing month.

It is not important whether Green Matters will be credited with having started a revolution or whether it just brought the green revolution to light and supported it. The truth is that the push from underneath is often what it takes to prompt governments to act. In fact, both citizen dissent and support are a necessary and healthy part of this process. So as citizens you are urged to not only desire positive change but also push elected officials to make it happen.

In the meantime, change in your home and in your life can happen fast. So if you are reading this and know that you've got more to do, then by all means get started! Take some small steps. Walk or bike to work. Hang your clothes out to dry. Set your air conditioner on a lower setting this summer.

In case you are doubtful, it turns out that small steps and individual actions DO make a difference. A well-reputed 2008 McKinsey and Co. U.S. study found that 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions are in the direct or indirect control of consumers – how we live, travel, and consume. So indeed we can make a difference right here at home – one committed household at a time.

Sonya Hull is a local consultant and Project Manager for Fredericton's Green Matters campaign. If you have topics you would like the Green Matters writers to cover in this column, please e-mail us at greenmatters@fredericton.ca.