



The Daily Gleaner

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Walk to School!

October in Fredericton is a beautiful time of year. The mornings can be chilly, but often by the time that school and the workday ends the sun has warmed the air enough to permit a jacket-free walk home!

And as we head into October we may actually see a lot more people out walking - it is **International Walk to School Month**; an event started in 1994 with a walk to school week in a county in Great Britain with just a handful of schools participating. Then by 1996 close to 100 local authorities had joined in. Over the next three years, United States, Canada and New Zealand joined the walk with hundreds of thousands now participating. In 2000, the first International Walk to School Day took place on October 4th, and Australia, Ireland, Cyprus and the Isle of Man also joined the ranks - over two and a half million people were estimated to have walked that year. By 2006, International Walk to School Month was declared and as of 2007, 42 countries and millions of walkers participated.

As you can see, this event has come a long way in a short period of time and didn't take much catch on. For good reason of course: there are so many benefits of walking. For some the event signifies a healthier lifestyle – good heart health and burns a few extra calories. While for others it is an earth-friendly way to commute, producing exactly zero CO₂ emissions!

There are many local schools participating in the Walk to School Month in Fredericton. Albert Street students will walk from the Delta Hotel on Tuesday, October 7th; on Friday, October 10th Connaught Street Elementary school children will meet at the Wilmot Park Senior Citizen's Center; and Montgomery Street Elementary school will be walking from the UNB Campus on Thursday, October 9th. For a complete listing of Walk to School events in your area check with your school or www.greenmattersfredericton.ca.

A Canadian organization called Green Communities has a program called Active & Safe Routes to School www.saferoutestoschool.ca, and in addition to promoting Walk to School Month, it supports a variety of programs such as: 'No Idling at School'; 'Walk/Wheel Wednesdays'; and Classroom Mapping, which teaches kids about their neighborhood. They also promote a 'Walking (or Cycling) School Bus' – which combines healthy exercise with hands-on street proofing lessons, and reduced air pollution emissions. A Walking (or Cycling) School Bus is described as two or more families walking or cycling to school together for safety and fun. On the website there are many free resources for teachers and parents to start implementing some of these programs in their own school. Why not take the initiative to get one started at your child's school this year?

And this month, as you walk or bike to school with your child, or as they set out on their own – help them keep a log of the distance they've walked in the month. This will keep them motivated and at the end of the month they will be surprised and proud of their accomplishment. And this may motivate them to keep at it for the rest of the school year – now that would be a success!

Whatever your reasons for walking to work, school or the store, whether it be for health, relaxation, or the environment, you can rest assured that an active commute is a guilt-free carbon-zero way to get around town!

Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who looks for everyday ways to lower her impact on the environment. Walking to work is one of them.