

CASE STUDY

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Take the Ten Percent Challenge!

The 10% Challenge is a voluntary program developed to raise public awareness about global warming and to encourage households and businesses to reduce their global warming-causing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least ten percent. Although the project emerged from the Burlington, Vermont Mayor's task force, participants now hail from across Vermont and beyond. Since its official launch in 2002, 93 businesses and 1,200 residences have begun to reduce their global warming pollution. The program fosters recognition of individual actions, while motivating and tracking the larger community's progress toward its climate protection goals.



LESSONS LEARNED IN THE 10% CHALLENGE

Linking to a larger vision of sustainability inspires people to join campaigns like the 10% Challenge.

Identifying project champions and promoting early success stories also encourages participation.

Messages simple and fun enough to pass the "kid test" work best.

Emphasizing immediate reasons for acting, including cost savings and health, is crucial.

Involve key stakeholders (elected officials, municipal decision-makers, faith communities) from the start.

Community Profile

Burlington is a thriving urban center and progressive community of approximately 40,000 residents located on Lake Champlain in northwestern Vermont. It is a vital city, with a regional medical center, several colleges and state offices. Burlington provides the economic base of the surrounding region, providing jobs in manufacturing, retail, medical and educational services in part due to the presence of the University of Vermont.

In 1996, in response to increasing concerns about the effects of climate change, the Burlington City Council voted unanimously to join ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection™ Campaign to reduce their contribution to global warming. Assuming business-as-usual conditions, Burlington's greenhouse gas emissions would have continued to grow at 3.4 percent per year from 1997-2005, resulting in a 40% overall increase in emissions by 2005. In contrast, Burlington's growth in greenhouse gas emissions has slowed to 1.4 percent for this time period. During this period,

transportation emissions grew from 30 to 37 percent of the total, indicating a disturbing trend for this sector.

Project Initiator & Partners:

The Alliance for Climate Action (ACA), first established by the Mayor of Burlington as a



Task Force, was tasked with developing an inventory of energy use and emissions and to make recommendations to help the City meet its GHG emissions reduction goal of ten percent below 1997 levels by 2010. One strategy was to develop and implement a public education campaign to foster civic commitment to climate protection activities; this was the origin of the 10% Challenge, which has since prevented a potential 70,000 tons of carbon pollution. The 10% Challenge spread to several communities

across Chittenden County and beyond to other Vermont communities, although most participants remain in the Burlington area.

The Alliance for Climate Action offers resources and suggests ideas to achieve immediate emissions reductions for businesses, homes, schools, institutions of higher education, governments, manufacturers, faith-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Participants are encouraged to register on the 10% Challenge website, calculate their CO₂ emissions, pledge specific ways in which they will reduce their carbon emissions by at least ten percent, and



recalculate their emissions along the way to measure how much they have reduced. The website serves as an information hub to centralize resources, and ACA staff consults with interested individuals, businesses and institutions, helping them calculate and reduce emissions while educating employees, and creating opportunities for recognition and awards.

Costs & Financing

The 10% Challenge was originally a project of the City of Burlington. It is supported by a variety of governments and foundations including the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the public utility, Burlington Electric. Additional funding to develop the 10% Challenge program was provided by the Department of Energy via the State Energy Program, Vermont Community Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and several private foundations. The professionally-designed website, which was partially donated, cost ACA \$12,000, and has a maintenance cost of about \$500-

\$1,000 per year. Additionally, program costs include three part-time staff members, office space donated to ACA by Burlington Electric, and resources donated for education and outreach by ACA partners. Since the program brings together many other diverse groups, costs are often shared between organizations, especially for marketing, while collaborating for shared goals.

Benefits

The 10% Challenge has exposed thousands of Vermont residents to the issue of climate change using creative methods, such as: tray liners in McDonald's restaurants, public service announcements by key officials, radio ads and appearances, a calendar of kid's art about ways to save electricity, a "Mow Down Pollution" campaign where citizens trade in gas lawn mowers for deeply discounted electric alternatives, a mascot called Climo-Dino, and a musical road



show entitled "Beat the Heat." ACA's Executive Director, Debra Sachs, believes that the campaign has been successful because of its links to stakeholders who may not otherwise have tied their missions to climate change prevention. By bringing together disparate groups, she says, "we are unifying our market approach to promoting voluntary behavioral changes." To date, the program has made positive steps to advance shared goals and intends to continue working on the unsolved problem of global warming.

Challenges

Educating the public is difficult enough, but motivating people to actually change their behaviors has presented the greatest challenge to the program. Although the rate of emissions *growth* in Burlington is slowing, the City's overall emissions are still increasing; it will require due diligence on ACA's part to meet the City's goals for 2010. It has also been difficult maintaining funding for their operations, with only three part-time staff members.



Future priorities

The Alliance for Climate Action will continue to target new groups of people and employees to take the 10% Challenge. They are particularly concerned with strengthening outreach for their transportation partners like the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Vermont Agency of Transportation, Chittenden County

Transportation Authority and Vermont Rideshare, since transportation is the fastest growing sector and amounted to the biggest growth in Vermont's emissions.

Other communities taking the challenge

In March 2003, 80 Vermont communities passed resolutions in favor of legislative action to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy; three of these also specifically included language encouraging participation in the 10% Challenge, joining the communities of Burlington, Middlebury and Brattleboro that had already voted to support local efforts to combat global warming. Combined, these six towns represent 12% of the total state population. Communities in New York, New Hampshire, Colorado, and Minnesota are also considering adopting the Challenge; others, such as Keene, NH, and Cambridge, MA, have used the 10% Challenge as a model for their efforts to reach out to businesses and citizens to increase global warming awareness and mitigation commitments.



Contact information: For more information on how to take the Challenge or to bring it to your community, visit the 10% Challenge website at www.10percentchallenge.org or contact Debra Sachs by e-mail dsachs@10percentchallenge.org or phone (802) 865-7330.