

What Cool Schools Can Do

by Tom Yohemas



Unlike government and industry, some schools are making great progress towards meeting or beating the international goal of reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions below 1990 levels. A study of 161

Alberta schools involved in the Destination Conservation program revealed that energy conservation measures had reduced the schools' emissions of CO₂ by more than 5,576 metric tonnes and had saved \$457,399 in utility expenditures over a one-year period. Clearly, the reduction of greenhouse gases can lead to substantial economic as well as environmental benefits.

The following are activities that students, teachers and staff can undertake to save energy and reduce carbon emissions. Most topics are divided into two parts: no-cost activities that students and staff can undertake, and technical initiatives that need to be implemented by maintenance and custodial staff. As you will discover, the possibilities are limited only by the imagination of your school community.

Electricity

Electricity typically represents about 60 percent of a school's total utility budget.

- ❖ Invite guest speakers from local utility companies to promote conservation at school assemblies.
- ❖ Monitor the school's utility bills to track changes in energy use.
- ❖ Set up a bulletin board display showing the school's energy use and the potential savings through conservation and retrofitting.
- ❖ Start an Electric Police or Powerbusters Club to encourage energy conservation.
- ❖ Have students audit equipment in the school, checking for energy efficiency and proper maintenance.



David Dodge

Toilet paper, tape and a pencil – the only tools needed to perform a draft-proofing audit at school.

Computers

- ❖ Install energy-efficient screen savers on your computers.
- ❖ Turn off computers during lunch breaks, after school, on weekends and any other time they are not in use.
- ❖ When buying printers or other computer hardware, check their efficiency on the EnergyGuide (Canada) or Green Star (U.S.) labels.

Photocopiers and laminators

Photocopiers and laminators consume large amounts of electricity and produce unwanted heat.

- ❖ Use an overhead master for exam questions.
- ❖ Purchase photocopiers with energy-saver standby functions.
- ❖ Turn off photocopiers at night, on weekends and on holidays.
- ❖ To reduce peak demand loads, use laminators only when other equipment such as kilns and photocopiers are not running. Better yet, try

to reduce your use of this energy pig.

- ❖ Limit staff to a certain number of photocopies per year to reduce electricity and paper costs. Staff can brainstorm alternatives with their students or environment club members.

Technical controls

- ❖ Reduce peak demand loads by scheduling air handling units to go on when other machinery is inactive.
- ❖ Install control systems that can shed or shift lower priority electrical loads to minimize their effect on peak demand.
- ❖ Install variable speed motors in large fan units that do not always need to run at full output.

Heating systems

- ❖ Examine windows and exterior doors and report drafts to your maintenance department.
- ❖ Encourage the closing of exterior doors by having students make presentations and classroom visits.

- ❖ individual and group actions that could be undertaken as concrete steps against climate change;
- ❖ the commitment needed from all of Earth's citizens in the fight against climate change;
- ❖ solidarity as an effective means of action.

The presentation could end with an introduction to the solidarity ride project and a discussion of the commitment needed from everyone involved in order for the project to succeed. Presentation materials could include tables, graphs, maps, videos and photographs. Let your imagination run wild, but don't forget that excellent educational materials on the subject already exist. There is no need to reinvent the wheel! In most schools, two presenters can cover all the classes, but if the student population is very large, the cycling committee may train some teachers who in turn will give the presentations to their own classes.

Enlist the participation of as many as possible

In a project of this scope, there is no shortage of tasks, such as being part of a first-aid, repair or safety team; helping out the cycling committee; collecting sponsorships; gathering signatures on the petition; or participating as a cyclist. You can recruit volunteers while raising awareness by setting up an interesting booth and inviting all members of the school community to visit you there at noon. This would provide an opportunity to distribute information on the solidarity ride; collect the names of participants; recruit adults to accompany the ride and students to be in charge for the day; collect signatures on the petition for the development of a network of bicycle paths in your municipality; and distribute the sponsor sheet for raising funds.

The size of the event will vary from school to school. It may be wise to limit the number of participants in the first year, and gradually increase it in subsequent years.

Choose a route

The happy band of cyclists that you will form will have a greater impact in the community if you choose a route that is strategic and realistic. Therefore, it is important to:

- ❖ choose a route that will give the group the greatest visibility;
- ❖ limit the route to 40 or 50 kilometers (25-30 miles) depending on the terrain in your area;
- ❖ schedule a stop at a park or school for a lunch break. During the break, put on a show that will energize the cyclists or have a speaker who believes in this cause to give a motivating talk;

- ❖ schedule a stop at city hall for the official presentation of the petition to the mayor.

Publicize the event

For the solidarity ride to have the greatest impact, it is important to inform the entire community of the school's commitment to the project. The local media should be made aware of when the ride will take place through a press release. You could also organize a press conference and give each journalist a press kit describing the ride and the spirit of solidarity driving it. The kit could also contain information on climate change, desertification, and the importance of supporting the development of public transit and establishing a network of bicycle routes. Invite journalists to join the cyclists along the route, during the lunch break, or during the official presentation of the petition to the mayor. A team of young reporters can be asked to provide media coverage of the event.



Solidarity cyclists petition mayor for a network of bike paths.

Practical advice for a successful solidarity ride

- ❖ Solidarity rides should take place on a school day so that more students and staff are able to participate.
- ❖ Arrange for an adequate number of adults to accompany the ride (one adult per 15 students).
- ❖ Form teams of students to be responsible for first aid, repairs and safety.
- ❖ Ensure that the ride is preceded by a lead car that is clearly identified as part of the ride, and a vehicle to bring up the rear in case of any snags.
- ❖ Arrange for a police escort along the entire route.
- ❖ Make an appointment with the mayor for an official presentation of the petition on the day of the solidarity ride. Recruit a budding cameraperson to capture this special moment.
- ❖ Review the events of the day at the end of the ride.

A solidarity ride definitely requires a large investment of time and energy from the organizing committee, students, teachers and the rest of the school community. However, my experience has shown that in addition to broadening students' scope and view of the world, a solidarity ride allows them to take concrete action that they can be proud of. It provides each of them with the opportunity to take his or her place as an active and responsible citizen.

Happy cycling! ♻️

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