

This Year, Resolve to “Be the Change You Want to See”, and Help Vermont Make Progress on Climate Change

By Deb Markowitz, Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

Last month, I met with a group of high school students who were thinking about what they could do in their schools and communities to help combat climate change. One of them asked whether what we do in Vermont to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions matters since climate change is a problem on a global scale. This caused another student to shout out the Mahatma Gandhi adage that we must "be the change we want to see in the world." Both of their points were excellent. Vermont is a small state and the challenge of climate change is global, but, as we saw with Tropical Storm Irene and the half a dozen significant flood events we experienced since then, we are not immune from the impacts of climate change. If we are going to prevent further damage to Vermont (and to the rest of the world), each one of us has an obligation to reduce our contribution to the problem.

The good news is that we are making some headway. Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions decreased in 2010 and again in 2011 to an amount equal to our 1990 levels even though, back in 1990, Vermont's population was about 10% smaller (60,000 people fewer) than it is today. This means our investments in energy efficiency, adoption of stronger motor vehicle emissions standards, and renewable energy policies are working. But we need to do more. Our emissions will not continue to decline without a concerted effort.

In that spirit, I challenge you to join me in resolving to reduce our greenhouse gas contributions in the coming year.

At the personal level:

- Set aside one day a week for an alternate commute - by carpool, bus, walking, or teleworking. Check out GoVermont www.connectingcommuters.org/ for some options.
- Consider buying your next car with better fuel economy, or make the pledge that your next car will be an electric vehicle. Look at www.fueleconomy.gov and www.DriveElectricVT.com before you buy.
- Keep your thermostat set a few degrees lower this winter, and put on a sweater. Do a home energy audit and weatherize to make your home more efficient and comfortable. Check out www.encyvermont.com and www.energysmartvt.com/ for more information.
- Replace traditional incandescent light bulbs with much more efficient and longer-lived compact fluorescent or light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs.

- Compost your food waste. Check out ANR's website at www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/compost/main2.htm or go to the Composting Association of Vermont's site at www.compostingvermont.org/index.htm for more information.

At the community level:

- Join your neighbors on the local energy committee. Visit the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (www.vecan.net) to find the committee in your community.
- If you move, relocate to a downtown or village center where you can walk or bicycle to work or shop.
- Encourage the installation of electric vehicle charging stations in your community. Low interest loans are available from the Vermont State Infrastructure Bank. Visit www.veda.org/financing-options/other-financing-option/state-infrastructure-bank-program/ for more information.
- Get involved in local land use decisions -- protecting our traditional land use patterns with walkable, livable village centers surrounded by a working landscape and forested mountains may be the single most important contribution we can make to both reduce our contributions to climate change and prepare Vermont for the changes that are already here.

Please join me in resolving to work together in 2014 and beyond to do our part to meet Vermont's goal for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By continuing to work toward this goal, we can help ensure that Vermont maintains a livable climate with many "Happy New Years" to come.