

Good Green Results
For BP Post 7/16/08

Red, white, blue and green were the colors of the day under the ColorBrightonGreen tent at the July 4th Celebration at Meridian Centre Park on Friday. Results were in for Curb Your Car Week and 10% Challenge, and the news was good.

ColorBrightonGreen is a volunteer citizen committee of the Green Brighton Task Force formed in spring 2007. The committee's focus is education and civic engagement to help the people of Brighton reduce their carbon footprint for a healthier and sustainable environment.

The idea behind the 10% challenge is simple: people sign a pledge to find ways to reduce their energy use by 10%. Achieving the goal really is easier than you think. I know because I tried.

During the past year, 290 individuals and 16 businesses have signed the pledge for the 10% challenge, and 86% of those surveyed estimated that they had achieved the goal.

My husband and I signed the pledge with the best of intentions. Like 88% of others, we have been in the habit of turning down our thermostats for years, in our case from the "energy crisis" of the 70's and thought cutting by 10% would be fairly easy.

Like 77% of those surveyed, we found opportunities to eat local food products, and I enjoyed browsing the delightful assortment of fresh produce, baked goods and other items at Brighton's Sunday morning farmer's market.

Fifty three percent had an energy-efficient furnace and 47%, a hot water heater. We converted our oil burning furnace to a gas this year. Over 30% had purchased other new energy efficient appliances as the need to replace them arose. We now have a new, more energy efficient washer and dryer, since some appliances have years of service left, and one has to consider the balance between energy saved, energy needed to recycle them, and the family budget.

Fifty five percent said they save hot water some or all of the time, At home, we are now shortening those long, hot showers and are using the energy saving cycle on our dishwasher.

Although we are aware that some homeowners have secured permits to install solar panels, and others are using a geothermal system to heat and cool their homes, none of the 10% Challenge participants reported such use. We are presently evaluating the costs and benefits of converting to a geothermal system for our heating and cooling at Town Hall.

Curb Your Car Week was also a success. Three hundred eighty four people participated from May 18-25, leaving their cars parked, used alternative transportation when possible, or worked from home. Eighty eight percent cut the number of car trips, and others saved by car pooling, biking, walking, and taking a bus.

That week was mostly rainy and cold, making the results even more impressive. I found encouragement in comments of some participants.

Marina Jagodzinski tried the bus. “This was my first adventure riding RTS buses to and from French Road School. With a small lifestyle change, and rising one hour earlier, I managed to save \$40 in fuel cost.”

Jim Tappon, who had been thinking about riding his bike to work for years, said “This incentive has put me over the hurdle of doing it.”

Ruth E. Hyde saved 29 miles by carpooling and improved her mileage by driving more slowly on the expressways.

Kathryn Jensen noted, “Not all businesses are alternative transportation friendly.” She pointed out that many drive-up windows won’t serve people on bikes, and more bike racks are needed in the area.”

Erica Loewenguth said, “Even though the challenge is over, I still stop to think about where I need to go and alternative ways to get there.”

For those who have already participated, we thank you for your commitment to help improve our environment, to save energy costs, and to reduce our reliance on imported oil. For those who wish to join this effort, please visit the ColorBrightonGreen website www.colorbrightongreen.org to sign up, and add your success story to the greening of Brighton.