

Cities lead the way

“I truly believe that the cities that thrive in the 21st century will be the ones that embrace environmentalism as a way of life.” Mayor Richard Daley, Chicago

There’s an amazing (and amazingly bi-partisan) revolution happening now in the United States. Did you know that nearly 400 US mayors have signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, committing themselves to meeting or beating the Kyoto Protocol in the absence of significant federal action? “That’s a west coast thing,” you might say. Actually Ohio boasts nine of those signatures, among them: Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo. Not bad for a rust-belt state. A few standouts among the other Midwest and Eastern signatories: Chicago, New York City, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Boston, and, ironically, Washington D.C. These cities are driving and embracing the new green economy, and will be ahead of the game as our country transitions to sustainable energy.

What does it mean for a city to meet the Kyoto Protocol? The international agreement’s goal for the US is to reduce greenhouse emissions to 7% below 1990 levels by 2012. This is what these cities are doing to reach that goal:

First: Cities are urging the state and federal governments to enact legislation to limit emissions, and accelerate clean energy development and fuel efficiency. They are specifically asking Congress for some sort of “cap and trade” system.

Secondly: City governments are taking action locally in their own communities to “meet or exceed Kyoto Protocol targets.” Here’s the “such as” list from the Agreement:

1. Inventory global warming emissions in City operations and in the community, set reduction targets and create an action plan.
2. Adopt and enforce land-use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, and create compact, walkable urban communities;
3. Promote transportation options such as bicycle trails, commute trip reduction programs, incentives for car pooling and public transit;
4. Increase the use of clean, alternative energy by, for example, investing in “green tags,” advocating for the development of renewable energy resources, recovering landfill methane for energy production, and supporting the use of waste to energy technology;
5. Make energy efficiency a priority through building code improvements, retrofitting city facilities with energy efficient lighting and urging employees to conserve energy and save money;
6. Purchase only Energy Star equipment and appliances for City use;
7. Practice and promote sustainable building practices using the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED program or a similar system;
8. Increase the average fuel efficiency of municipal fleet vehicles; reduce the number of vehicles; launch an employees education program including anti-idling messages; convert diesel vehicles to bio-diesel;

9. Evaluate opportunities to increase pump efficiency in water and wastewater systems; recover wastewater treatment methane for energy production;
10. Increase recycling rates in City operations and in the community;
11. Maintain healthy urban forests; promote tree planting to increase shading and to absorb CO₂; and
12. Help educate the public, schools, other jurisdictions, professional associations, business and industry about reducing global warming pollution.

What if our community were to set such a goal? How can we do our part to avert or slow a climate crisis, and move toward being a part of the new sustainable economy?

Our community has already been active in some of these areas. The Shade Tree Commission, Keep Alliance Beautiful, Mount Union's Nature Center, and the SARTA bus system come to mind. Mount Union College is exploring sustainability issues on campus. I'm sure there are others. But how do we take our action to the next level? And where are we missing opportunities? In the coming months, I will take a look at each of the twelve points above, to see what we are doing now, and to explore what might be possible. Look for a seminar March 29th, hosted by Keep Alliance Beautiful, on the topic of Sustainable Development in our city, schools, and businesses.

Here's some of what mayors are saying:

"I believe the environment is becoming a growth industry, and I want Chicago to be a part of it...If we can lower the citywide temperature one degree through green methods, we can save \$150 million a year in energy costs...Every five percent reduction in water use saves the city \$1.2 million in the cost of treating and pumping water." Chicago Mayor Daley

"The reality of global climate change is urgent. The stakes are high - locally and globally - and we need to act. As a City government, we've already cut our greenhouse gas emissions by more than 60% compared to 1990 levels. But it's not enough - we need to work together as a community to set responsible limits on global warming pollution." Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels

For more on this topic, and to see other cities' Climate Action Plans, you can visit these sites: www.seattle.gov/climate/govResources.htm ; www.coolmayors.com ; www.usmayors.org/climateprotection/

Or on television, see: *Design: E2 (The Economics of Being Environmentally Conscious)*, WVIZ/PBS, Tuesdays at 7:30 pm, a program which is looking at cities' and designers' responses to the climate crisis

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