

Climate Change at Work

Workplace workshop helps increase awareness of global warming dangers and provides an action plan people can stick with.

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How do you take the successful “blue box” recycling concept, in which a simple action taken by the public provides a solution to waste management, and apply it to climate change? Problem is, the climate change issue is more complex and difficult to explain to the public than recycling. To get around these barriers, Toronto environmental consulting firm Enviro RIS has developed a workplace-based training program, to raise awareness of climate change and to offer realistic options for action to the public.

Delivered to groups of 25 to 30 people at a time, the “Count Me In!” workshop explains climate change and the link to energy efficiency, and then focuses on 30 actions people can take at home and while travelling to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. The design of the workshop and follow-up/monitoring program is based on adult-education and

social-marketing principles regarding behavior change. These are:

- adults learn best by “doing,” and actually applying new information;
- learners differ in learning styles. Therefore, a variety of activities are used, such as individual exercises, group games, lectures, etc.;
- a personal commitment made along with a group of peers (which feels safe) is likely to be met;
- a written promise is more likely to be followed through, and prompts after the initial commitment (particularly when people know the prompts will arrive) spur people into taking action.

Finding the right concept

Enviro RIS conducted initial research into finding a “blue box”-style solution to climate change back in 1997. When recycling blue boxes were introduced in Ontario in the 1980s, they represented a simple icon people felt helped them contribute to solving the province’s landfill crisis, and were widely accepted. Enviro RIS came up with the idea of workplace-based training and envisaged a National Personal Pledge Program, whereby actions taken by individuals would be added to a total pledge, which could then be used to challenge other sectors to do more.

Environment Canada funded a feasibility study on the workshop concept in 1998. Enviro RIS tested it by interviewing 25 senior executives across the country. The interviews identified a two-hour, workplace-based training program, with the employer’s endorsement, as the best method to access Canadians and raise awareness of climate change. The concept was also pilot-tested at an insurance

Figure 1. The 10 most common actions workshop participants agree to take

Keep car tires fully inflated 50%	Turn off computer at night 29%
Turn off lights when not in use 39%	Fix leaky faucets 27%
Recycle more 38%	Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows 26%
Reduce driving speed 34%	Avoid non-recyclable packaging 25%
Reduce idling 33%	Switch to compact fluorescent lighting 25%

company late that year, and the workshop was modified to its current version.

Engineers at Enviro RIS were involved in all stages of the training program’s development, including concept design, estimation of greenhouse gas impacts of various actions (these were peer reviewed by staff from Torrie Smith, an Ottawa-based consulting firm), training program delivery and monitoring database design details. Enviro RIS engineers also developed a service that involves custom designing the Count Me In! workshop to address workplace-based energy efficiency activities.

In April 1999, Enviro RIS received \$150,000 from the Climate Change Action Fund (CCAF) to deliver the workshop at 30 work locations and monitor the impacts of workshop attendance on behavioural change among participants. The Count Me In! workshop is also used as one component of a more comprehensive public education and outreach project, the Action By Canadians (ABC) program, sponsored by the Energy Council of Canada, which also received a contribution from the CCAF.

The program includes a monitoring system (designed by the ABC program and used by Count Me In!), which tracks reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions workshop participants commit to making, and then follows up to determine actual reductions achieved through their completed actions. The follow-up program and the personal signing of a pledge form are social marketing techniques, which are essential for encouraging ongoing change in behaviour and increasing awareness.

With funding from the CCAF and the Energy Council of Canada, the workshop has been delivered to over 3500 participants at 175 workshops at government offices, non-government institutions and private-sector companies. Of the 3500 workshop partici-

pants, 84 per cent registered formal pledges to reduce GHG emissions. Those not completing the pledge forms were mainly participants who had to leave early from the workshop. A handful of participants felt uneasy about the pledge and declined to participate.

Making promises

Workshop participants have pledged to reduce a total of 5990 tonnes of GHGs through actions in their homes and on the road, which averages 2 tonnes for each participant who completed a pledge. The 10 most commonly pledged actions are listed in Figure 1.

Enviro RIS also conducted research on workshop participants’ awareness of, and attitudes toward, climate change/energy efficiency issues. Participants’ awareness of climate change was measured at 80 per cent before the workshop, and 89 per cent immediately afterwards, using a standard test. Count Me In! workshop participants rated the statement “I believe that limiting climate change by conserving energy is the right thing to do,” as 5.4 out of a possible score of 6, indicating a high level of support for the statement.

Checking up on commitment

A follow-up and monitoring component was included in the research to try and track longer-term behavioural change as a result of attendance at the workshop. The design of the follow-up and monitoring program has changed over time, and different approaches have been tested. Follow-up approaches used with different workshop participants included emails, faxes and regular mail. Different follow-up periods were also used to gauge effectiveness. The overall response rate to follow-up communication among partici-

ipants was about 40 per cent.

Participants were also surveyed on their awareness two months after attending the workshop. Over 90 per cent of respondents said they considered themselves to be more aware of climate change and personal energy use. A total of 76 per cent said they were more aware of newspaper and magazine articles about climate change, and 53 per cent said they were more aware of TV programs on climate change. Participants were also asked to report additional actions taken related to climate change, other than those they committed to at the workshop (see Figure 2 below).

Winning awards

Enviro RIS recently won an OTTER (Ontario’s Top Training Excellence Recognition) from the Ontario Society for Training and Development. The designers of the Action By Canadians (ABC) climate change training program received the “Best External Training Program” award. OTTER awards recognize companies and individuals who have developed, produced, and delivered innovative Canadian products in the training and development field.

The ABC program is funded by members of the Energy Council of Canada and the federal government’s CCAF (Climate Change Action Fund).

In future, the climate change workshop will continue to be delivered as part of the Action By Canadians (ABC). It will also continue to be delivered to other organizations on an as-requested basis. ◆

Figure 2. Other actions participants report taking after attending the workshop

