

## City takes diplomatic shot at Harper over climate issues

Thunder Bay City Council passed a resolution one week ago that stated somewhat diplomatically their disapproval with the Conservative government's decision to withdraw Canada from the Kyoto Protocol. The Protocol is a legally binding treaty, the first and only world agreement that addresses ways to reduce human generated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

A motion and supporting information was the work of the EarthWise Advisory Committee and was presented by Councillor Joe Virdiramo, the Chair of the Intergovernmental Liaison Committee.

The introduction noted that the world agreement to continue with Kyoto in Durban, South Africa to limit carbon emissions had undergone "substantial changes". This was a polite way to acknowledge the role of the Harper government in withdrawing Canada and postponing any significant political action with climate change at the world level for other decade.

The resolution read "With respect to concern over Canada's Status with the Kyoto Protocol we recommend that a letter be drafted to the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister of the Environment expressing concern regarding Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol Agreement . . . and how Canada will continue to play a role in the global efforts to tackle climate change".

The Harper government has signalled it will play a role in climate change – in a dangerous direction.

A 25 per cent reduction in GHGs by 2020, with 1990 as the baseline, is viewed as a minimum to avoid dangerous climate change by most world scientific associations and agreed to by the European Union. It was part of the **Climate Change Accountability Act (C-311)**, passed by the House of Commons at on May 5, 2010 but not debated or ratified in the Conservative dominated Senate. This goal implies annual GHGs of **447** mega tonnes (mt) in 2020.

The Harper government made an arbitrary choice of 17 per cent below 2005 emissions by 2020: 747 mt – 127 = **620** mt.

However, Scott Vaughan, the Auditor-General, has noted last month that the Conservative government had not begun to plan or implement policies. His estimate was that Canadian GHG emissions would not decrease with the stated Harper scenario. Instead, emissions would increase by 7.4 percent over 2005 and be **802** mt in 2020.

This is in contrast with policies and progress at other levels of government, including Thunder Bay where facilities and operations reduced electricity consumption by 6 per cent and natural gas by 10 per cent from 2009 to 2010. Many other municipalities and several provinces also have examples of reduction and coherent plans for 2020.

The concerns of the Thunder Bay Council are quite valid. Increasing greenhouse gases are connected to warmer temperatures at ground level and in the lower atmosphere. This warming means more moisture in the atmosphere and the potential of more intense thunderstorms. Both the frequency of heavy rainstorms and their intensity have increased in recent decades.

The motion was submitted well before last week's Council meeting but the timing was uncanny. Discussion and the affirmative vote took place just hours after the first effects of the severe rainstorm were taking place. Damage is still being assessed and the sewage treatment is still being restored to full operating capacity.

Individual storms cannot be directly blamed on climate change but the potential for more frequent intense events was predicted by the atmospheric science community decades ago.

The following table illustrates changes in frequency of heavy rain events in Kenora, Ontario.

Rain in mm	1951-60	1961-70	1971-80	1981-90	1991-2000	2001-2010
50-79	1	1	4	4	6	5
80-99	0	0	2	0	1	2
100+	0	0	1	1	2	1

A profound increase in the frequency of heavy rain events from one heavy rain per decade to two in one month as Thunder Bay experienced in May. Many regional communities have had similar changes. High-intensity rain events have consequences for flood events, soil erosion, infrastructure and damage in urban areas.

Impacts of natural disasters are felt most by the individuals and municipalities involved. Provincial governments may respond with financial assistance in the disaster-relief framework. The federal government provides aid only if the cost exceeds provincial capabilities. It is likely that that all levels of government will be called upon more frequently in the years to come.

The Harper government has a track record of obstruction of efforts to tackle climate change on the national and world stage. It provides no model for other levels of government or individual Canadians.

Kudos to our city council. Let us hope others follow and send a collective message.

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