

# The Green Worker



CUPE BC's Environment Committee Newsletter

January 2009



## The Unknown Risks of GMO's

A genetically modified organism (GMO) or a genetically engineered (GE) organism is a living thing that has had a gene spliced into it from another living thing. In the past, nature limited crossbreeding, but genetic engineering bypasses biological boundaries, which means we can move genes from a fish to a tomato.

It is estimated that 70% of processed foods contain GE ingredients, yet little scientific study has been done about the health and environmental risks of genetically modified foods. Unfortunately, Bill C-517, which called for mandatory labeling of GE ingredients, was defeated in Parliament last May.

To avoid GE foods, CUPE members can buy local foods at Farmers' Markets and stores near us. Eating local food can change the world.

Watch the video *The World According to Monsanto*, or go to [www.foodsafetynow.org](http://www.foodsafetynow.org).

Check [www.bcfarmersmarket.org](http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org) to find a Farmers' Market near you.

Watch Craig Noble's sustainable-food documentary *Tableland*.

**Anne Grube**  
CUPE 3500

## CUPE's Cool Action – Climate Change Workshop

Twelve participants from all over British Columbia came together in Parksville, November 3-7, 2008 to attend CUPE's first ever week-long National 'Cool Action-Climate Change' pilot workshop. The workshop raised awareness, developed strategies and focused on what CUPE members can do to address climate change as individuals, as union and community activists.

Adding to the success was the fact that it was a virtual paperless workshop using projection instead of paper. Participants enjoyed the course content and were pleased to take home a compact disc full of resource materials, video's and links

instead of binders full of papers...how 'cool' is that!

"The privatization of our services and resources is drastically changing the way we live and work. CUPE's Cool Action-Climate Change workshop is a must for CUPE workers and activists, as we strategize our offense for public services in the age of global warming. We hope to inspire our members to be leaders in a growing shift of consciousness toward a Healthy, Clean and Green world."

**Bev LaPointe**  
Chair, CUPE BC environment committee

## Get Political – Get on Board the Green Train

Smart growth and transportation advocates can do a lot to help achieve livable communities through sustainable transportation policies. Be an advocate in your community:

- Ensure sustainable transportation policies are included in Official Community Plans and neighbourhood plans.
- Advocate for the development of compact mixed-use neighbourhoods that increase proximity and accessibility of daily amenities.
- Advocate your council to develop and adopt a Transportation Master Plan to ensure eligibility for provincial funding and grants.
- Advocate for better choices such as increasing and expanding transit service, adding bus



shelters and improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

- Participate in local public budget debates and advocate for municipal funding of transit and sustainable transportation projects.
- Encourage municipalities to support alternative transportation such as Neighbourhood Electric Vehicles and/or discourage car use.

**Brent Voss**  
CUPE 1136



CUPE BC's Environment Committee (L-R): Brent Voss (CUPE 1136), Al Gallupe (CUPE Staff Rep), Doug Elford (Co-Chair, CUPE 15), Martha Higgins (CUPE 798), Sheryl Burns (CUPE 1936), Anne Grube (CUPE 3500), Michele Alexander (CUPE 15), Greg Donovan (CUPE 1048), Bev LaPointe (Chair, CUPE 339), and Louise Piper (CUPE 458). Missing from picture is Carol Mauriello (CUPE 2087).

## CUPE Climate Change Action and the University of Northern BC

CUPE 3799 Green Committee representatives Mark Thompson and Deborah Nowak from University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC - Canada's Green University) say their committee meets regularly and is growing in size.

In attempts to bring about positive action in the workplace, their green committee organized and hosted a Climate Change workshop at UNBC in November 2008. Esteemed speaker Dr. Stephen Dery (<http://web.unbc.ca/sdery/>) spoke on global climate change and the implications to Northern BC.

Participants attended a workshop to initiate the process of devising and framing a workplace green policy for bargaining (<http://cupe.ca/environment/green-bargaining-guide>).

Just goes to show you how active and involved CUPE members are when it comes to creating a Healthy, Clean and Green world.

**Greg Donovan**  
CUPE 1048

## Positively Hemp

Hemp is one of the most environmentally positive crops that exist today, improving soil quality as it grows. It is naturally resistant to insects, fungus and other pests, and requires no herbicides. Hemp grows rapidly during its vegetative period, becoming tall and thick. It naturally suppresses weeds, shades and mulches the ground while its deep taproot breaks up and aerates the soil. These attributes promote healthy microbial soil life and leave the earth in a condition where it is easily worked and able to retain moisture during the next growing season.

**Bev LaPointe**  
CUPE 339

## Coalbed methane impacts B.C. communities

Coalbed methane is a natural gas, mostly methane, held in coalfield deposits by the enormous pressure of the water. To extract the gas, it must be "de-watered" then the coalbed is "fraced" or fractured to allow the gas to flow. This "produced water" is then disposed of by re-injecting it back into the

ground, well below any domestic aquifer.

Coalbed methane mining leaves a large industrial development footprint and one only has to look at the pristine northern area of BC known as the Sacred Headwaters, or the ecosystems along the east coast of Vancouver Island to realize the potential for environmental devastation. While there are studies being done to determine the best/safest way to mine coalbed methane, the extent of the long-term environmental impacts on the groundwater and aquifers are unknown. Water is our lifeline and it is ours to protect and preserve for ourselves and the future of all life.

**Martha Higgins**  
CUPE 798

## The Air Car

Currently about three companies are working on producing compressed air-powered cars.

There was an agreement between MDI in France and Tata Motors in India to put their air car into production in late 2008 or 2009.

The proto-type air car model has a top speed of 68 mph with a range of 125 miles. Refueling the air car at gas stations that have custom air compressor units would only take a short time. A refill cost of about \$2.00 to fill it up with 340 liters of air makes the unit very cost-efficient.

Not only will this air car be economical to run, it will have many added features in its computer-based electronic system, GPS guidance system, GSM telephone and internet connectivity, voice recognition, and every form of digital entertainment.

Best of all, compressed air vehicles would emit no pollutants. What can be better than that for our environment?

**Carol Mauriello**  
CUPE 2087



## CUPE BC and the Alberta Tar Sands

CUPE BC Environment committee and Aboriginal working group have partnered up in support of First Nations living downstream of the Alberta Tar Sands and to protect B.C. from the potential environmental effects of the proposed \$4 billion Enbridge Gateway Pipeline project.

The project would see an 1150 kilometre dual underground pipeline straight through BC, carrying tar sands oil to Kitimat and loaded into supertankers that would then ply BC's fragile coastal ecosystem for export to California and/or Asia. The return line would import a product called 'condensate' (petroleum-based dilutant) which is environmentally detrimental and reported to be more flammable than gasoline.

A recommendation on behalf of both committees calling for a moratorium through signing on to the 'no new approvals' campaign as well as financial support for a six stop speaking tour received overwhelming support from the CUPE BC executive board.

We encourage all CUPE members to join with the Alberta Federation of Labour, CUPE Alberta, all treaty chiefs of Alberta and more than 60 other community organizations by signing on to the 'no new approvals' campaign:

(<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/no-new-approvals-on-tar-sands-developments>)

### Bev LaPointe

Chair CUPE BC Environment Committee

### John Thompson

Diversity Vice-President (Aboriginal)

## Tar Sands Spoiling the Athabasca

Residue from the Alberta oil sands, what the oil companies call "process water," is being pumped into the Athabasca river. Under provincial regulations, Suncor alone is allowed to discharge up to 150 kilograms each day of oil and grease into the Athabasca.

## Overwhelming support for Toxic Free Canada

The CUPE BC environment committee extends a tremendous thank you with much appreciation to CUPE BC, CUPE 15, CUPE 339, CUPE 402, CUPE 561, CUPE 900, CUPE 1936, CUPE 2081, CUPE 2087, CUPE 2254, CUPE 3500, CUPE 3523, CUPE 3570, Okanagan Mainline District Council, Vancouver Island District Council.

Your generous support to prevent toxins in our schools and workplaces will ensure a 'Healthy, Clean and Green' future for children and CUPE workers across British Columbia.

Together we have raised \$10,000 for the great work of our ally Toxic Free Canada!

Also: the environment committee, OH & S Committee and Women's Committee support Toxic Free Canada's efforts to produce a *CancerSmart with Breast Cancer Prevention* booklet. Please watch for the future distribution of this booklet as it explores the link between exposure to toxins and breast cancer.

### CUPE BC Environment Committee

By choosing greener forms of communication such as email and conference calling, over 'fossil' travel, the committee continues to reduce its carbon footprint by 50 per cent per 2-year term.

Are virtual meetings ideal? Maybe not.

Is scorching our planet ideal? For sure not!



**Public vs Private Water**

**Say NO to bottle water!  
Say YES to public tap water!**

## Metro Vancouver looks at 'high-rise' vertical gardens

As human density crowds out crop land, it becomes necessary to ship food in from farther away therefore increasing carbon emissions and further escalating the effects of climate change.

With urban population expected to reach 3.4 million in the next 30 years, Metro Vancouver is considering new initiatives to support locally grown food through urban agriculture while at the same time, reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Sounds impossible right? Well, it looks like Surrey could very well be on the way. At least one developer is considering building a vertical farm in Whalley.

Vertical gardens or 'high-rise' farms could potentially be as high as 30 stories, complete with solar panels, glass walls and an irrigation system that would create a greenhouse effect enabling enough food production to feed as many as 50,000 people.

### Michele Alexander

CUPE 15

## 6 reasons to “eat local”

- 1 Local food builds the local economy.
- 2 Local food tastes better.
- 3 Local food is fresher and more nutritious.
- 4 Local food supports local farm families.
- 5 Local food preserves genetic diversity.
- 6 Local food means less “food miles” and a cleaner environment.



## 5 Ways to Cut Fuel Costs (and reduce carbon emissions)

- 1 Share a ride – save money and reduce pollution.
- 2 Don't meander -- plan your trip so you can take the shortest route.
- 3 Lighten up – lift your foot off the pedal a bit – less driving time doesn't always mean less fuel consumption (reducing speed from 100 to 90 km/h will reduce fuel consumption by 10%.)
- 4 Keep your vehicle's tires inflated to the correct pressure.
- 5 Google “hypermiling” to learn driving techniques to save fuel.

## BC Fed Climate Change Working Group

The BC Federation of Labour Climate Change Working Group report was well received by more than 1000 delegates at the BC Federation of Labour convention in November 2008 as it put forward several recommendations.

The recommendations show a commitment to working jointly with environmental organizations in Canada and the United States to press our governments to implement solutions that contribute to building an equitable, sustainable and safe planet; to educate union members of the issue of climate change and the cap and trade system; organize a green jobs/ green economy conference; develop strategies to ensure that all unions and the Federation of Labour are carbon neutral in the shortest time possible; and work with the Federation's youth committee and the CFS on the issue of climate change.

### Doug Elford

*CUPE 15, CUPE BC Environment Committee Co-chair, CUPE BC rep BC Fed Climate Change Working Group*

## Carbon Tax or Cap-and-Trade?

Most CUPE members would agree that greenhouse gas emissions and human activity are largely responsible for the current global warming crisis.

The BC Liberals claim that their carbon tax will significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet studies have suggested that it is the rising cost of fuel, not the carbon tax that act as a deterrent to driving.

Moreover, in the next few years, the poor will be paying more for the carbon tax than the wealthy even though it's those with money who generally have larger carbon footprints.

Given that industry is disproportionately responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, why not introduce a cap-and-trade system that limits allowable emissions? This is a popular system in Europe and was used to solve the issue of chlorofluorocarbons responsible for the hole in the ozone layer.

Why should CUPE members be forced to pay for the polluting habits of big industry and the wealthy?

### Sheryl Burns

*CUPE 1936*

## CUPE BC environment committee member lands trustee position

Louise Piper, president of CUPE 458 is a political activist and dedicated CUPE BC environment committee member who is committed to a Healthy Clean and Green world for CUPE members and our communities. Piper is so community minded that she decided it was time to broaden her scope around issues that affect her community. She ran in the 2008 Chilliwack School Board elections and landed a seat at the table where she will be helping to

establish district policies, set budgets and priorities that reflect the community's values.

Piper's passion for education, commitment to student success and her understanding of the importance of a literate society will be a definite asset for the citizens of Chilliwack.

We here at CUPE are proud of her and poised to assist in any way we can. Way to go Sister!