

ECONEWS #210

Happy New Year! EcoNews is a monthly newsletter funded by your kind donations. It dreams of a world blessed by the harmony of nature, the pleasures of community, and the joys of personal fulfillment, guided and protected by our active citizenship.

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SEEDY SATURDAY

February - 'tis the season of the seeds, earthly miracles dropped into worm-rich soil that turn skywards and seek glory as cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and squash, gardens loaded, taste buds bursting, summer smiling on spring's moist labour, ancient knowledge of tiny seeds growing into mighty Garry oaks, parsley. Victoria's Seedy Saturday is coming up at the Conference Centre on Feb 19th - last year, it was so packed it felt like Christmas. Qualicum Beach is Feb 5th, Salt Spring Feb 12th, Sooke Feb 26th. This is the start of another cycle of growth, from the soil to the dinner table, locally grown, organic, delicious. If you feel unconfident, there are lots of courses to help you learn - see Green Diary.

DO YOU WANT TO BE A YOUNG FARMER...

but don't know where to begin? Stewards of Irreplaceable Land (SOIL) is a non-profit society which links Canadian farmers who are willing to train apprentices with folks who want to work and learn on an organic farm using sustainable practices, offering hands-on learning in exchange for learning the basic skills of an agricultural career. The SOIL website lists 16 farms on Vancouver Island which can take apprentices in Sooke, Victoria, Sidney, Salt Spring, Duncan, Nanoose, Port Alberni, Fanny Bay, Royston, Denman and Cortes. See www.soilapprenticeships.org.

COAL MINING IN BC

Coal is the scrunched up blackened remains of ancient trees and plants which absorbed the sun's energy 200 million years ago and converted it into carbon. When they fell into a swamp, the carbon got buried underground.

In Nanaimo, it was coal that made the Scottish immigrant Robert Dunsmuir rich, and built his path to being Premier of BC. And it was coal that took the lives of many miners.

Today, coal is a huge cause of global warming. The last time the temperature rose by 3°C, the sea level was 25 metres higher - and we are on track for a 4°C rise, thanks in part to coal.

BC has a strong commitment to climate action, so you might think there'd be action on coal. Not so. In 2010, Port Metro Vancouver exported 28.5 million tonnes of coal to Korea and Japan; our exports of coal and natural gas produce 105 million tonnes of greenhouse gases when burnt, far outweighing BC's domestic emissions of 63 million tonnes.

In November 2010 Shirley Bond, Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure, boasted that "We can actually see a point when coal exports from BC could double and that would mean tremendous rewards for our provincial economy", while Minister of State for Mining, Randy Hawes, praised the opening of five new coal mines in northeast BC.

Here on the Island, this is an immediate issue since Compliance Coal Corporation is seeking approval for its Raven Underground Coal Project in the Comox Valley, owned 60% by Compliance, and 40% by two Japanese and Korean companies (see www.theravenproject.ca). The mining deposit area covers 3,100 hectares 5 km

inland from Buckley Bay, and contains 59 million tonnes of exploitable coal, which would be trucked to Port Alberni and shipped across the Pacific. If the coal was all dug up and burnt, it would add 212 million tonnes of CO₂ to our planet's atmosphere - as much 60 million cars produce during a year.



There are two initiatives underway to stop this. The first is CoalWatch (www.coalwatch.ca), which is organizing local resistance and putting on a big public meeting at UVic on Feb 9th (see Diary). A host of people in the Comox Valley are outraged - they want green jobs in a green valley, not dirty coal mining jobs, and all the pollution coal-mining brings with it.

The second is a province-wide initiative to stop the production and export of coal in BC by 2015, because of the climate emergency. They are gathering pledges from people who agree that they will each "decide on the protest that best suits our convictions" (Martin Luther King) and work with like minded people to make sure the province takes urgent action on climate change. www.stopcoal.ca.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS TREATY

The goal is clear - to rid the world of all nuclear weapons. Mayors for Peace is a network of cities seeking immediate negotiations to establish a nuclear weapons free world by 2020. They have 4,301 members, including 98 of the world's 192 capital cities. In December, the US Senate voted to ratify the New START Treaty, which will reduce the number of deployed strategic warheads to (only) 1,550 on each side. The US and China have yet to ratify it; Israel has signed but not ratified; India, Pakistan and North Korea have yet to sign it. A second major treaty is yet to be negotiated - a global agreement to halt all production of fissile materials for weapons purposes, and the larger goal needs to

address the 22,000 nuclear warheads that exist worldwide. Also in December, Canada's House of Commons voted unanimously to "deploy a major world-wide Canadian diplomatic initiative in support of preventing nuclear proliferation and increasing the rate of nuclear disarmament. A world free of nuclear weapons by 2020. That's the goal. See www.disarmingconflict.ca



TEN MYTHS ABOUT THE NEW EFFICIENT LIGHT BULBS

The government is phasing out the old inefficient incandescent light bulbs, as a way to help Canada save money and become more energy efficient, but as a result, there's a lot of myth-making going on about the compact fluorescent bulbs. Here's a quick guide to help you discuss them with a disgruntled workmate or neighbour.

Myth #1. The old incandescent bulbs have been banned. This is just not true - the new regulations simply govern light bulbs in the 75-100 watt range. Philips has a range of Halogena Energy Advantage bulbs that are dimmable, contain no mercury, and meet the new standard. See www.bit.ly/halogena

Myth #2. The waste heat from the old bulbs helps heat my home, reducing the amount of natural gas I need to burn. It is true that the old incandescent bulbs produce waste heat - this is why they are so inefficient as lights. If you're burning gas for heat, the argument goes, removing the bulbs means burning more gas, increasing your greenhouse gases. But let's pause to think. Electricity in North America is constantly traded across borders. BC Hydro imports between 5% and 15% of its electricity, depending on the depth of snowpack, mostly from coal and gas-fired power in the US. When we use less power, it's the imported power that we reduce, so even if the new bulbs increase the use of gas, this is balanced by the decreased use of imported coal and gas fired power. Also, since most bulbs are close to the ceiling, the waste heat rises, where it's neither useful nor near the thermostat that regulates gas heating. In

warmer months, it's just waste heat, plain and simple.

Myth #3. They contain mercury! Yes, they do contain a tiny amount of mercury. Tuna contains mercury too, which comes from the air pollution that coal-fired power plants produce. Francis Rubinstein from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found that if you broke a bulb and did a good job of cleaning up, your mercury exposure would be like taking a tiny nibble of tuna. If you closed all the doors and smashed the bulb with a hammer, it would be like eating a can of tuna, since fish absorb the mercury in air pollution from coal-fired power. So it's no big deal, unless you make a daily habit of smashing the bulbs. If you do break one, open a window, leave the room for 15 minutes, and then brush up the waste - don't vacuum it. For more details, see <http://bit.ly/CFLsafety>

Myth #4. They produce a sickly flickering pale light. Yes, it's true - some do. So don't buy those ones! Buy quality bulbs! There are plenty on the market that produce the a warm yellow light. Look for ones labeled with a lower colour temperature (Kelvin) around 3,000. 5,000 is white light.

Myth #5. They don't work with dimmers. True in 2007, but not today. If you want a CFL bulb that works with a dimmer switch, they're more expensive (and waste more energy), but you can buy one.

Myth #6. They don't last as long as promised. In California, the utility PG&E found that instead of 9.4 years of useful life, the reality is closer to 6.3 years, with a faster burn-out rate in certain locations such as bathrooms and recessed lighting. But a regular light bulb burns out after 1,000 hours, so the new bulbs still last six times longer.

Myth #7. They don't come on immediately. No longer true in most cases. In my home, all but two of our 47 CFLs come on almost immediately.

Myth #8. There's no safe disposal mechanism. For sure there is - recycling programs for residential CFLs are mandated by provincial regulation. You can find the nearest recycling drop-off at www.productcare.org/lights

Myth #9. They produce "dirty electricity". This refers to the myth that the new bulbs produce harmful electromagnetic radiation, and the experience that some people have a bad reaction to the UV light. It does appear that some people who suffer from lupus and certain skin conditions can be

negatively affected by some bulbs, in which case they should buy a bulb marked as low UV, with a glass cover. For the vast majority of people, who have been using billions of bulbs all over the world for many years, there are no negative health effects.

Myth #10. They don't work in really cold weather. This is generally true - so look for ones with a special cold cathode weather ballast, which are good down to -23°C.

LED (light emitting diode) bulbs are more efficient than CFLs - but they are still very expensive (\$20-\$40), and their light is still very focused and limited. Prices will fall, and the technology will improve; in ten years they may well be the #1 bulbs.

So remind me - why are the old inefficient bulbs being phased out? They use four times more energy than the CFL bulbs, so making the switch plays a small but important role in helping us save energy, save money, reduce the use of coal-fired power, and protect our children's future. And that has my whole-hearted support.

ACTION OF THE MONTH NDP LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGN

As with the Liberal leadership candidates last month, now is a critical time to be asking the NDP leadership candidates where they stand on key issues that matter. So call them up! Ask them where they stand!

- * Continued climate leadership
- * A strong green economy
- * Reducing the voting age to 16
- * No offshore oil tankers in BC waters
- * Strengthening BC's carbon tax
- * Full protection for Flathead Valley
- * Protecting BC's fresh water
- * Banning cosmetic use of pesticides
- * Protecting BC's farmland
- * Making food security a high priority
- * Ending homelessness
- * Raising the minimum wage
- * Protecting the wild salmon

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