

Trust, BC Hydro to help islanders reduce electricity demand

Just in case anyone has failed to notice, the climate crisis is now a significant international issue. Growing public awareness in the Gulf Islands, as elsewhere, has created a demand for action. Policies, incentives and regulations are being developed at all levels of government to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to attempt to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change that lie ahead.

The Islands Trust recognizes that the Trust Area is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change and that changes are needed to address its potential impact. How we can grow and buy more local food, how we reduce our dependence on cars and trucks, how we design and furnish our homes to reduce energy use. Underlying all is the need for a dramatic reduction of current levels of consumption of energy and material resources.

The Trust, B.C. Hydro and the Canadian Institute for Climate Studies at University of Victoria have agreed to work together on a two pronged strategy. The first is to help islanders find ways to reduce emissions (called mitigation). The second is to look at ways to help island communities adapt to the effects of a changing climate. Things we didn't think of 10 years ago, (e.g. increased winter rainfall and streamflows, lengthened summer droughts, impacts of combined storm surges/tides/sea level rise and increased frequency of extreme weather events) now need to be considered in island planning processes.

In terms of mitigation measures, the Trust is working with B.C. Hydro to help islanders reduce electricity demand. A first step is to conduct a series of walk-through electrical energy audits of sample commercial/business and residential properties on three islands, Salt Spring, Gabriola and Saturna. The purpose of these audits is threefold:

1. To gain an understanding of how electrical energy is being used on the islands,
2. To help identify ways that the participants can save energy by retrofits or operational changes and,
3. To provide examples of how similar businesses and residences can save energy, money and reduce emissions.

There is already broad-based support in the Trust Area for such a program. Local Conservancies on many islands have identified climate change as a priority issue. Salt Spring has established an Energy Strategy Task Force, has prepared a baseline energy report and a Community Energy Strategy, with GHG reduction targets and recommended actions by sector to achieve these targets. They have also contributed an Energy Chapter for the official Community Plan and implementation of the Salt Spring Energy Strategy is underway. With a better understanding of how energy is being used on the islands, homeowners, businesses, and communities can set targets and challenge themselves and each other to save energy and reduce emissions.

For this audit program, 3 or 4 sample residential homes and 4 representative commercial properties on each of the 3 islands will be audited. Comparisons of electricity use between islands will be studied and opportunities for reducing electricity demand and GHG emissions identified.

The audits on the three islands are expected to be completed by late September. The results will be used by the Islands Trust and B.C. Hydro to provide residents and businesses with information about electricity conservation options relevant to the Trust Area.

Information about the Salt Spring Energy Strategy can be found at www.saltspringenergystrategy.org.

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