

Climate Change: Walking our way towards a solution.

Did you know that two-thirds of Canadian children live within a 30 minute walk of their school, but less than one-third walk as a rule? For many parents it is traffic safety, fear of strangers and hectic lifestyles that force us into our cars.

Let's face it, we all use our cars more than we used to, even for short trips like the journey to school. But whether it's for safety or convenience, all these short trips are contributing to a build-up of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, and adding to the locally produced air pollution that now plague most Southern Ontario communities.



There is a better way. ASRTS programs contribute to community safety, healthier families, reduced traffic and cleaner air.

Passenger transportation accounts for 45% of the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the average Canadian family. By reducing the number of short car trips, you can help slow down climate change. (Canadian Climate Change Centre, 1993).

Walking to school can **help reduce the effects of climate change**, which is a direct result of global warming. Climate change is already having significant impacts in Canada and around the world, including extreme weather conditions, such as flash flooding, droughts, and heat waves causing smog. As global temperatures rise, Ontario summers are becoming increasingly warmer and this results in increased levels of air pollution or smog. According to Health Canada's statistics, following 'smog days' hospital

admissions for respiratory problems increases by 6%; the number of infants admitted to hospital for respiratory problems increases by 15%. There is an economic downside to this too-the Ontario Medical Association states that poor air quality is costing the Ontario economy over \$9 billion annually, which includes health care costs and lost work time.

Other ways your family and school can get involved in climate change solutions:

- **Adopt a polar bear** through the World Wildlife Fund and find out how climate change is endangering this Canadian species. Visit www.wwf.ca/en/PolarBearCentral for more details.
- **Check out the school section** of the Pembina Institute's Web site at www.pembina.org
 - **Turning off your engine** around school zones when dropping off or picking up your children can protect them from harmful air pollution. If every driver of a light duty vehicle in Canada avoided idling for just five minutes, we would prevent more than 4500 tonnes of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere (Natural Resources Canada, 2001).
 - Families that **walk regularly to school** can prevent the release of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. For example, nine families participating in a regular walking program over one year can avoid the release of 1,000 kg of greenhouse gas. AND save a collective \$230 in fuel costs (Pembina Institute: www.pembina.org).





Some of us are just too busy to walk our children to and from school every day. But perhaps you can manage to do it just once or twice a week? **Check out the options below:**



Photo by Rob Mooy

IT'S REALLY COOL TO WALK TO SCHOOL!

Walking Wednesdays/Trekking Tuesdays:

Set aside one day a week or month to walk to school.

Walk a Block: Park your car in a legal, safe parking spot a few blocks from the school, then walk the remaining blocks with your children.

"If children walk, there will be fewer cars on the road. Walking to school decreases pollution and makes us healthy." Student, Morton Way Public School, Brampton.

Walking Buddies: A great way for older students to walk to school in safety with their friends. Students look out for each other and enjoy the responsibility this entails.

Walking School Buses: Volunteer parents who live on the same block or in the same apartment building, take turns walking children to and from school. Initially everybody walks, sharing responsibility, conversation and building social networks along the way. Later, as trust is built and schedules get organized, taking turns can save time.

Don't let the weather get you down ... be sure to dress appropriately when walking or biking to school. Umbrellas and rain gear for wet weather days; snow suits, boots, hats, scarves and mitts for snowy days; sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat for sunny days. And be sure to throw an extra pair of socks or mitts into the backpack.



This fact sheet was prepared by Green Communities Canada's Active & Safe Routes to School program

www.saferoutestoschool.ca