



Tuesday » June
3 » 2008

Website can help measure carbon footprint

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OTTAWA - A new Internet site will allow Ottawa residents to calculate their carbon footprints and see how adjustments in lifestyle can lighten their effects on the environment.

The City of Ottawa has joined Zerofootprint, an organization based in Toronto, to give residents the Internet tool that allows them to calculate their own environmental impacts but also compare them to others and see how the city is doing as a whole.

Residents can go to ottawa.zerofootprint.net and, using their e-mail addresses, create personal accounts that measure carbon emissions. The software program asks a series of questions about use of transportation, food consumption including that of pets, home heating and power use, amount of garbage produced and recycling. The program calculates as you enter answers, so you can see the effect of lifestyle on the total number of tonnes of CO2 emissions per year. If the standard questionnaire takes too much time, there's a shortened version available.

Peter Hume, the councillor for Alta Vista and chairman of the city's planning and environment, went on the site and calculated his footprint, with a result in the 20s, mostly because of his frequent airline trips to and from Toronto for meetings and conferences. He said another factor that boosted his imprint was his consumption of red meat.

Several other cities are working with Zerofootprint, including Seattle, Boulder and Toronto.

Mr. Hume said the city is enthusiastic about using the Web-based calculator so that citizens can see the effects of their lifestyles and choose to make adjustments. The average footprint in Canada is 11.2 tonnes per year and the average in Toronto is 11.5 tonnes.

He said the city needs to do things such as increase the number of market-garden operations to reduce the amount of food importation, and improve the capacity of OC Transpo so that citizens can drive less. Ottawa Council is aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Citizens who want to "offset" their carbon emissions can do so by helping fund environmental projects. For instance, someone with 6.9 tonnes of annual emissions would spend \$111 supporting a reforestation project at Maple Ridge, British Columbia through Zerofootprint.

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