

Southern Alberta Environmental Group

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NEWSLETTER

January, 2005

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Announcements

SAEG January Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 6 January 2005

Fish & Game Hut, 9th Ave and 10 St S., Lethbridge

The agenda includes updates on ongoing activities and discussion of new SAEG initiatives including addressing light pollution. Everyone welcome. Refreshments provided.

Fostering Sustainable Behaviour: Community-Based Social Marketing Workshops

Friday, 11 February 2005, Edmonton

Monday, 14 February 2005, Calgary

Recycling Council of Alberta is sponsoring a workshop with Doug Mackenzie-Mohr world expert on an approach for fostering sustainable behaviour. Topics will include identifying the barriers to a desired behavior; using behavior change "tools" to design more effective programs; pilot testing a program; and evaluating the impact of a program.

For more information call 402.843.6563 or visit

www.recycle.ab.ca.

Notes and Updates

Rest and Get Well, Sylvia – SAEG President Sylvia Campbell is recuperating well at home after a brief hospital stay in early December. It is hard to keep this good woman down. All going as planned, Sylvia expects to be fully engaged in her volunteer activities again by early 2005.

New SAEG Website: Your Input Is Needed (by Rena Woss) - SAEG is in the process of designing a first ever website! We are hoping to reach a wider audience, particularly in our locale on issues and information of common concern; stay in touch with each other, link up with other groups and possibly even do some e-commerce on line - i.e. membership dues and donations.

In designing the website we need to identify the main points to cover. The points will translate into buttons. For example, one button might be 'About Us'. Clicking on the button could give the viewer information about SAEG's history, mission statement, contact information etc. What other buttons (5-7) do we need? Please contact Kelsey at kelsey.prenevost@shaw.ca if you are willing to help out.

A New Logo For SAEG (by Rena Woss) - We are looking to have a new logo design. This isn't a contest, but we will proudly give credit to the person whose logo is chosen and

provide a year of free membership. We look forward to your input! Please send us your ideas and designs, to the address above, by 31 January 2005.

Volunteers Needed for Spring Home and Garden Show (March 16 – 19) and Ag Expo (March 2 – 5) (by Rena Woss) - SAEG has a table booked for both of these upcoming shows. We feel that this is a great opportunity to let our community know about our group and about the work we do. As well we are hoping to increase our membership through this effort. Volunteers will be needed to sit at the booth. If you can help out, please contact Rena at 328-2898 or at phoenix328@shaw.ca.

Light Pollution and Energy Waste (by Rena Woss) - Dark night skies are ever diminishing and with that our population is ever more disconnected from the grandeur of space. The International Dark Sky Association is one of many groups working around the world to enlighten politicians and city planners of this problem. Canada is recognized as a leader in dark sky preservation. In our country we now have three dark sky preserves, and plans for more. As well many cities have changed their lighting to address this problem; Calgary being one. Here in Lethbridge, we have a mayor who is aware of the problem and aligns with the route that Calgary has taken. The benefits are two fold; increased dark night skies and increased energy savings: a win-win situation. We thought you would be interested in knowing that SAEG has a subcommittee that will be working on this issue.

12 Green Days of Christmas – The Lethbridge Environment Week Committee has created a new version of the "12 Days of Christmas" song. Each day has a tip on how to reduce our ecological footprint during the holiday season.

- ...a homemade decoration (from things around the house)
- ...two fabric bags (for gift wraps; they're reusable)
- ...three strings of LED lights (they use 90% less energy)
- ...four calling cards (the gift of conversation)
- ...five hours of time (reconnect with family and friends)
- ...six free range turkeys (locally produced and healthy)
- ...seven family passes (less wrapping)
- ...eight potted flowers (they go on living)
- ...nine fair trade items (help the less fortunate)
- ...ten used novels (or a library card)
- ...eleven Santa's reindeer (adopt a woodland caribou)
- ...twelve less bags of garbage (reduce, reuse and recycle)

Join the Oldman Watershed Council Now – Have you signed up to be a member yet? To be eligible to vote for the Board of Directors or to run for a position in March, you must sign-up for your free membership before January 1, 2005! Visit www.oldmanbasin.org or phone 382-4239.

Study Finds Pesticides in Drinking Water – Alberta Environment recently released a summary report of results from a fourteen year survey of pesticides in treated water. The report – *A Summary of Pesticide Residue Data from the Alberta Treated Water Survey, 1995-2003* – is available at www3.gov.ab.ca/env.

Since 1995, new analytical instrumentation has enabled detection of lower levels of pesticide than previously was possible. About 1800 water samples were collected at 440 water treatment facilities in Alberta and tested for pesticide residues.

Pesticides were detected in 26.6% of all samples in the province. In the Oldman River basin, 46.9% of samples had from one to four pesticides with 2,4-D (42.7%) and MCPA (18.3%) most common. Less common were Dicamba (6.1%), Mecoprop (4.3%) and Bromoxynil (4.3%). All are herbicides used to control broadleaf weeds in cropland, pastures and lawns. A mixture of these herbicides is sprayed on fertilizer pellets to make weed and feed type products.

Although it was expected that there would be higher detection during May – July when most pesticides are applied, there was no seasonality in detection frequency or magnitude. This implies pesticides are retained in water treatment systems and there is little degradation during periods of cold weather and low light.

Highest detection frequencies and concentrations occurred at facilities using surface water, however pesticides also were observed where groundwater was the source.

The results suggest that many Albertans are chronically exposed to low levels of herbicides in their drinking water. Pesticides detected were well below Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines; however, nine pesticides detected do not have guidelines. Little study has been done so far on long-term low levels of exposure or on the combined effects of the chemicals on human health.

A comparison of raw water compared to treated water in Lethbridge and Carmangay showed that the water treatment processes had little effect on reducing pesticide concentrations. These results confirm findings from elsewhere and point out the need for watershed protection to minimize pesticide contamination.

The report makes several recommendations including continued monitoring, developing guidelines for all pesticides detected, and reducing pesticide use in rural and urban watersheds.

Air Quality Planning for Livestock Operations – The Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) is convening a working group to scope issues associated with air emissions from confined feeding operations (CFOs) and develop a strategic plan for addressing the issues. SAEG has expressed an interest in participating in the working group. The first meeting of the working group is scheduled for late January in Edmonton, following participant selection. Contact Cheryl at 328-1245 for more information.

Needs Assessment for Alberta Environmental Groups - Alberta Ecotrust, an important environmental grantmaker in the province, recently undertook a survey to help “focus more concretely on building the capacity of voluntary sector groups to undertake meaningful work”. Survey results are summarized in an October 2004 report - *Maximizing*

Effectiveness: An Assessment of Environmental Priorities and Voluntary Sector Capacity Needs. The report is available at www.albertaecotrust.com. Some of the key findings follow.

The following environmental issues emerged as priorities:

- Water (both quantity and quality)
- Wilderness and wildlife protection
- Climate change
- Urban land management

The great majority of respondents felt that existing programs are not adequately addressing most environmental issues. For every issue, a larger percentage of ENGO respondents rated issues as being more poorly addressed than did non-ENGOS.

The most important solutions identified for addressing root causes of environmental problems are:

- Facilitate long-term thinking by political and government leaders
- Develop a strong public sense of stewardship and responsibility for the environment
- Ensure that the full environmental costs of production or consumption activities and resource uses are included in market prices

Participants generally do not believe the mainstream media give enough coverage to environmental issues in Alberta nor do the media provide enough depth. 79% of respondents regard mainstream media coverage of the environment as slightly or strongly biased towards economic development and industrial/business interests.

A substantial majority of respondents regard raising awareness and educating the public about environmental issues as a key role for the voluntary sector. This was closely followed by an emphasis on the roles of advocacy and watchdog.

Scientists and researchers are the most trusted sources of environmental information, followed closely by environmental organizations, health professionals and Environment Canada. Politicians were rated lowest.

Environmental and community organizations identified their strengths and weaknesses. Most groups rated fundraising as their highest priority for building capacity, followed by organizational promotion and general communications, and governance and leadership.

The three most common suggestions for improvement were that grantmakers:

- Fund operations, staffing and other core needs
- Sponsor training sessions or fund individuals to attend sessions sponsored by others
- Facilitate networking and partnerships among NGOs and between NGOs and others to share experience and expertise.

In essence, environmental groups face some pretty significant challenges. They are expected to be educated and professional, create public awareness and inspire action, participate in public consultations, read technical reports and provide timely feedback, collaborate with a variety of stakeholders, and undertake research – all without revenue or core funding! From Maximizing Effectiveness: An Assessment of Environmental Priorities and Voluntary Sector Capacity Needs, Alberta Ecotrust, 2004.