

MCC aims to shrink carbon footprint

Chad Umble and Linda Espenshade

April 20, 2010

AKRON, Pa. – Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is committed to shrinking its carbon footprint by 20 percent over the next 10 years, thereby reducing its contribution to climate change.

The commitment arises from MCC's Care for Creation Task Force that has identified air travel and inefficient buildings as the primary sources of MCC's carbon emissions, often referred to as a carbon footprint.

There are 12 MCCs in Canada and the United States with multiple offices, many with staff members who travel by air regularly to carry out programming. Carbon emissions from air travel and inefficient buildings are primary contributors to climate change, many scientists say.

The task force, which has been meeting for about two years, is committed to helping MCC's staff in Canada and the United States make environmentally conscious choices, both personally and organizationally.

Its commitment dovetails with part of MCC's purpose statement, "MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation."

"One of the reasons why these kinds of changes are important is that the people we are called to serve are being disproportionately impacted by climate change," said Dan Wiens, MCC's water and food coordinator and co-chair of the task force. "This is because they have fewer resources to cope with a changing climate, and they tend to live in mid-tropical zones, where climate change is more extreme."



On Jan. 1, MCC partnered with Sustainable Waterloo, a nonprofit that helps organizations reduce their carbon footprints. To Sustainable Waterloo, MCC will be accountable to meet its goal of reducing carbon emissions by 20 percent over the next 10 years. The organization provides computer-based tracking tools, analyzes data and creates reports for MCC.

“Tracking carbon output is like doing financial accounting,” said Susan Wenger, administrative assistant to the MCC executive office and co-chair of the task force. “To be good stewards, we need to monitor what we emit and determine where we have room for improvement.”

In 2009 and 2010, MCC made travel cutbacks for budget reasons. These cutbacks may be continued as a way to meet the goals for reduced carbon outputs, Wenger said.

West Coast MCC reduced travel 17 percent last year and 50 percent in the previous year through rigorous tracking of travel, said Sheri Plett Wiedenhoefer, executive director.

Wiens said the MCC Canada and MCC Manitoba office in Winnipeg is increasingly scrutinizing air travel to see if it is actually necessary. “We’re not only thinking about the time and the finances involved in travel, but also the carbon.”

The Winnipeg office is also reducing its energy use with a new geothermal heating and cooling system. The system, which has been operational for about a year, cost \$450,000 to install compared to an estimated \$370,000 for a traditional heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system. Melaney Reimer, director of administrative services for MCC Canada, said the investment should begin to pay off soon through reduced monthly costs.

Geothermal heat works because water is circulated through the building from wells drilled on either side. The water radiates heat in the winter to warm the building and absorbs heat in the summer to cool it, Reimer explained.

In Akron, Pa., energy efficiency has been a long-term priority. Since 2003, the maintenance department has installed better insulation, new windows, energy-efficient appliances, twist fluorescent light bulbs and automated lighting and a redesigned heating system, among many other improvements.

Darren Kropf, the Creation Care program coordinator for MCC Ontario, said that since many of MCC’s global partners are feeling the first effects of climate change, MCC needs to make responsible energy choices that don’t threaten their capacity to provide for themselves.

“Give people a fish, they eat for a day. But teach them how to fish, they have food for a lifetime. Let’s also ask: ‘Is anyone polluting the lake?’” Kropf says.

Chad Umble is a freelance writer from Lancaster, Pa. Linda Espenshade is MCC news coordinator.