

Executive Summary *GREENING OPSEU* Report to 2006 Convention



Background

OPSEU members want our union to be part of the solution to environmental problems. We want a green union, greener workplaces, and cleaner, healthier communities. At the 2005 OPSEU Convention, delegates approved *Working for a Healthier and Safer Environment*. This motion directed the Executive Board to bring a union-wide action plan to the 2006 Convention. The plan was to ensure that all OPSEU members become informed about environmental issues, address OPSEU's own activities and workplace issues, and concentrate on attainable goals.

Plan Development

The Executive Board created the "Green Team" to develop the plan. With expert assistance from the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and Public Interest, the team gathered information about OPSEU operations (including types of buildings, transportation, bargaining processes, campaigns, and workplace issues) and held structured discussions in each region with OPSEU members and key OPSEU staff. This guided the development of a draft plan, *Greening OPSEU*, and a resolution — presented to you today. A more detailed report, identifying possible goals and strategies, will be submitted to the Executive Board in June 2006.

Our Record on the Environment

OPSEU has always fought for a strong public service. During the Harris years, this meant fighting cutbacks and privatization in water, forestry, environment labs, and public health departments. We also participated in the Walkerton tragedy hearings.

Some good starts have been made in our union-owned buildings. We have introduced recycling programs, pesticide-free environments, and energy-efficient lighting. Our two largest pension plans include environmental considerations in investments.

At this convention, we are awarding Dr. David Suzuki with the Stanley H. Knowles Humanitarian Award. We are offering delegates reusable mugs, reducing paper use, and conducting an audit of the convention's environmental impact. This information will help us understand how we can further reduce waste and help protect the environment for the 2007 Convention.

Greening Opportunities

Our review of OPSEU operations revealed many opportunities for environmental action. These include installing recycling facilities in our member centres and renovating our head office to make it more energy efficient. We need to review which changes make the most sense, environmentally and financially.

Our pension funds must provide secure retirements for the future of our members, but they also represent lots of financial muscle for green activities.

We have the potential to expand Joint Health and Safety Committees to include workplace environment issues, and we could also support member education about environmental rights on the job.

What Our Members Said

Members are deeply concerned about the environment. When good programs exist, such as blue box recycling, OPSEU members participate in them. But we feel the need for better information on environmental issues. As well, participation must be balanced with our demanding lives and many commitments.

Members feel the Joint Committee structure is a good tool for making workplaces greener. Members also emphasize that OPSEU should lead by example. Our anti-cutback and anti-privatization campaigns are worthwhile and should continue.

Our Action Plan

Based on our environmental review and consultations with members, we have identified eight areas of activity:

1. A Network of Green Stewards: Working together as members to stand up for environmental issues.
2. Standing up for Green Jobs: Continuing campaigns that protect both union jobs and the environment.
3. A Greener Union: Working to reduce the environmental impact of our union activities and operations.
4. Greener Workplaces: Supporting employers and members in creating greener, healthier workplaces.
5. Greener Pensions and Funds: Securing the future of our members while exploring ways to reduce the environmental impact of our investments.
6. Greener Lifestyles: Supporting members in taking reasonable and effective steps to create greener lifestyles.
7. Greener Labour Movement: Joining forces with other unions on environmental issues.
8. Greener Communities: Offering support to members and community groups that are working to build healthier communities across Ontario.

Four Important First Steps

We propose four quick-launch projects to get our long-term green vision off to the right start:

1. We will build on our greatest resource – the interest and concern of our members about the environment. That means creating a network of Green Stewards immediately, beginning here at this convention.
2. We will lead by example. We will perform an audit of the environmental impacts of this convention, begin energy-efficient lighting and "lights off" campaigns, and review our paper consumption with the aim of setting a paper reduction target.
3. We will develop tools for greening our workplaces. These will include model contract language for Joint Health, Safety and Environment Committees, and educational resources for members to inform them of their environmental rights in the workplace.
4. We will build a broad environmental component into existing education programs to provide members with the information requested.

Getting Involved

We ask you, representatives of your locals and regions, to bring this information back to your communities. This is only the beginning, and we will continue our discussions throughout the year.

Contacting The Green Team

Gino Franche, Patty Rout and Laurie Brown, can be reached by email through the OPSEU Website, Greening OPSEU link, <http://www.opseu.org/notices/greeningopseu.htm> or by fax, care of Aura Aberback at 416 443-0553.