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## **SD 42 counting backwards to zero**

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Zero net carbon emissions may seem like an impossible goal, but nonetheless, it's one the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District aims to achieve.

With the introduction of the provincial carbon tax last July, school districts across B.C. will have to pay for every tonne of carbon emissions they produce as of 2010.

School District No. 42 secretary treasurer Don Woytowich said estimates by the province peg the potential tax hit for a comparable school district at \$200, 000.

That's money that could better spent on teachers and computers, so the district is looking at a number of innovative ways to reduce it's carbon footprint, and in turn shrink its potential tax bill.

Woytowich said the district plans to sign the province's Climate Action Charter, which would commit it to become carbon neutral by 2012, and make it eligible for various funding to help reach that goal.

But there's not a lot of time to do so.

One program the district hopes reduces carbon emissions would see heating systems at two high schools converted to energy efficient models - at no cost to the district.

**Thomas Haney and Garibaldi secondary schools could have their inefficient conventional heating systems converted to a geothermal exchange system, which would be owned and operated by Terasen.**

The system, common in many European countries, uses heat from beneath the earth's surface to heat water, which is then used to heat the school.

**The district was approached by Terasen to take part in the pilot program, which is the first of its kind in B.C.**

**"We would serve as a model for all other [school districts]," said Woytowich. "This moves us a long way down the line in reducing our carbon footprint."**

The district is also hoping to partner with B.C. Hydro to create a new energy manager in the school district.

The new consumption czar would be responsible for identifying and implementing energy efficient upgrades, implementing energy education programs, and would be funded by B.C. Hydro.

The provincial power utility has already paid for a number of eco-upgrades in the district's facilities, such as lighting.

"It works out well for them," said Woytowich. "If they don't have to provide as much energy, they don't have to build massive infrastructure or buy energy."

The Greater Victoria School District was one of the first to take part in the program.

Glenn Brenan has been serving as the energy manager there for the past four years, and through a number of different initiatives and upgrades, the district has reduced its energy consumption and water use by more than 10 per cent.

"There's much more of a focus now on what we consume, and how we consume it," said Brenan.

This year, School District No. 61 has set itself the goal of reducing its energy and water consumption by another five per cent in preparation for the looming carbon tax. While that hasn't been easy with the unseasonably cold winter causing a spike in energy consumption, he believes the district is making progress thanks in part to recent lighting and plumbing upgrades.

One of the major functions of Brenan's position is developing education programs for students, teaching them how to curb their energy consumption.

One Victoria school has adopted an "Energy Ambassador" program, in which student volunteers make sure people turn off lights, conserve paper, keep doors and windows closed, and encourage recycling.

"They've been very diligent," said Brenan. "The enhanced awareness they bring has been very effective."

But the positive effects aren't just limited to the district's schools. As students learn to use resources in a more sustainable manner, that behaviour spreads.

"These are life skills they are learning," said Brenan.

B.C. Hydro spokesperson Simi Heer said it is in the provincial power utility's best interest to offer conservation programs.

"The payback for us is power," she said. "Conservation is another resource option like any dam or power plant."

"Except it is cheaper to conserve than to generate."

The B.C. Energy Plan mandates that B.C. Hydro must be entirely self-sufficient in its energy needs by 2016. Currently, B.C. Hydro must purchase energy from outside the province to meet peak demand, which creates a host of problems.

"Firstly, we don't know how that power is generated, and whether it's clean or not," said Heer. "And often it is more expensive than the energy we produce [in B.C.]"

B.C. Hydro plans to meet 50 per cent of the province's new energy demand through conservation programs such as Power Smart and the energy manager program.

However, the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District may have trouble finding an energy manager.

Demand is growing for energy managers in the wake of the carbon tax and a shortfall of qualified people could make it difficult to fill those positions. That's why B.C. Hydro is partnering with BCIT to create an Energy Management Certificate Program to train people to work in the field.

"We're creating champions of conservation," said Heer.

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