

Is it getting warmer?
Boulder's Climate Action Plan
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Global climate change is a hot topic in the public arena these days. There is increasing interest and publicity about global warming and the connection between climate change and our fossil fuel use. It is no longer a question of whether or not global warming is happening but rather, how can we educate people about the connection between our energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and how we can use and produce energy more efficiently.

Even if you are a climate change skeptic, there are many reasons to support efficiency in the way we produce and use energy. There is no disputing the fact that burning coal to heat water to create steam to drive a turbine to generate electricity is inefficient and costly. Why is the United States so committed to using these inefficient, non-renewable resources when proven, cost-effective technologies are available to create energy using cleaner, renewable resources?

As Al Gore claims in his movie "An Inconvenient Truth," global warming is now a moral issue. How can we explain to our children and grandchildren that we did not take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Since action is not being taken at a federal level, it is imperative that we create initiatives at a local level to address our inefficiencies. While Boulder's impact may not be significant in the global scheme, the power of communities acting collectively across the country is significant. Boulder Mayor Mark Ruzzin recently joined 275 other mayors in the US Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, which together represents over 48 million Americans.

The city of Boulder's adoption of the Kyoto Protocol goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions translates to a 24% reduction below current levels for Boulder. This is no small order, but city staff is confident that Boulder can meet and even exceed this goal. This is not about making drastic changes to our standard of living, but rather creating awareness around our habits, implementing upgrades to inefficient equipment and creating smarter building designs.

Staff at the Office of Environmental Affairs along with community volunteers and professionals developed a Climate Action Plan which guides Boulder to meeting its goals. Energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy are the cornerstones of the plan. Once efficiency is achieved, we can begin to explore our energy sources and take advantage of renewable resources.

Initiatives in the Climate Action Plan will facilitate households and businesses in Boulder lowering their utility bills through energy efficiency and conservation as well as incorporating wind power, solar energy, and other cleaner forms of energy. By investing approximately \$1 million per year to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy, the city's programs will assist homeowners and businesses to save tens of millions of dollars on their utility bills over the long run.

It is important to note that the Climate Action Plan does not propose giving subsidies but rather serves as a catalyst, by focusing on the most cost-effective actions first, such as promoting the use of energy-efficient lighting and appliances in homes and commercial buildings. Since collaboration is such an important component of an effort of this scale, the Climate Action Plan proposes utilizing private companies, non-profit organizations, community groups and volunteers to stimulate action on a large scale.

Some of the city's strategies are to provide low cost energy audits that show households and businesses where they can cut energy waste and save money. The Climate Action Plan also proposes to help homeowners and businesses find qualified contractors and obtain rebates offered by Xcel Energy. Another strategy involves promoting green buildings practices and updating energy codes for residential and commercial construction, as well as training builders, contractors and architects. Also, increasing the availability and use of cleaner fuels for vehicles such as ethanol and biodiesel will bring Boulder closer to the goal.

An example of one strategy is the Boulder Energy Brigade, a pilot program started this year, in collaboration with Longs Peak Energy Conservation and the CU Environmental Center. The objective of this program is to lower residential energy and water use through distribution of educational materials and energy and water conservation tools. Through this project, the city will offer 200 free one-hour energy audits to Boulder residents in several pilot neighborhoods.

The impacts of these efforts reach far beyond just meeting a goal, there are numerous environmental, social, and economic benefits. Boulder, along with hundreds of cities that have pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions, is providing an example for other cities, our state, and our country. Together, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions while reaping financial benefits and preserve the planet for our grandchildren.



Boulder Energy Brigade staff convenes after delivering energy kits to 250 homes: Senior tax workers, CU Environmental Center students and staff, Longs Peak Energy Conservation staff, and city of Boulder staff on July 15th, 2006 in the Majestic Heights Neighborhood.