

H.O.P.E. workshops

Toowoomba Regional Council initiatives

July/August/September 2009 – Cr Bill Cahill

Thank you for the invitation to outline a range of Toowoomba Regional Council's "green" initiatives.



I'd particularly like to thank H.O.P.E. Toowoomba's organisers for offering TRC the chance to participate in these Low Carbon Diet workshops.

I also would like to acknowledge the generous grants made to H.O.P.E Toowoomba and TRC by the Queensland Department of Environment and Resources.

Our respective organisations were awarded \$10,000 grants by the Queensland Department of Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation earlier this year.

The grants were awarded to help TRC and H.O.P.E. raise awareness of the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource's Low Carbon Diet program.

We will work with community groups across the region to explain how to participate in the Low Carbon Diet program and the benefits households can derive from the simple exercises.

Council is happy to contribute to H.O.P.E's Low Carbon Diet information sessions by providing many of the public venues.

My portfolio, Environmental and Community Services, encompasses many of council's services and programs that deal with these issues.

This portfolio, among other things, is responsible for Environmental Health Services. This includes enforcing local laws and regulations for water and environmental health.

It also covers waste management services, which include refuse collection and a range of recycling activities.

Council is well aware of its responsibilities across our own work activities.

Council has used some funding from the Department of Environment and Resource Management to promote and offer advice about low carbon lifestyle practices at Toowoomba's GardenFest in May this year.

Council's Sustainability Awareness Unit organised for aspects of the Low Carbon Diet to be promoted and demonstrated.

This involved workshops showing people how to divert organic waste from landfill by composting, storing carbon by planting trees and starting home gardens to grow food.

In addition, council's Bushcare and WaterWise branches combined with the Sustainability Awareness unit to supply plant-a-tree kits.

Each kit contained a capsule with 20 native tree seeds and a packet of water crystals. Five hundred kits were given away at the event.

Council also has an over-riding regional role offering services and information to help the wider community review and change daily household and business behaviour.

Specific programs which various residents and groups can use to reduce their carbon footprints include:

the **drumMUSTER** and **ChemClear** container recycling and surplus chemical collection services;

an **EnergyWise** appliance test kit (to check and gauge household appliance electricity use and the carbon emissions produced), and

the **Sustainable Home Toowoomba**. This is a display home featuring energy-efficient products and design aspects which residents can incorporate in new and existing homes.

(TRC also has a considerable water demand management education program and a range of brochures and online material about saving water for householders and businesses.)

Details of these particular programs include:

- **DrumMUSTER** – 12 venues across the region cater for agricultural, veterinary chemical container recycling. Primary producers and bulk chemical users can return residue-free containers that have the program logo.

By participating in the recycling program, participants ensure these containers are diverted from landfills and are not stored.

The used containers are taken by a Brisbane recycling firm and turned into wheelie bins and other items. Information is available at council's service centres or the *drumMUSTER* website.

ChemClear – While *drumMUSTER* recycles former chemical containers, ChemClear offers a collection service for registered ag and vet chemicals at the end of their life cycle or which are surplus to supplies.

This service requires pre-registration before the Chemclear collection team nominates a date and pick-up point.

This service ensures potentially hazardous chemicals do not end up in our landfill sites.

It also ensures producers, industry and business can safely transfer obsolete or excess chemicals and prevent any inappropriate disposal in the community and the environment. Unknown chemicals can be tested at the mobile facility.

Pre-registration can be completed on the internet.

EnergyWise appliance kits – A State Government-run trial has shown householders how to turn a little knowledge into considerable cost savings on their electricity bills.

The Department of Mines and Energy chose Toowoomba Library as one of three Queensland sites for the EnergyWise appliance test kit trial.

Toowoomba has been the most successful pilot with high loan rates and an extensive waiting list for the kit. Community demand has been higher than in other pilot programs in Cairns and Brisbane.

The testing is done using the EnergyWise toolkit and appliance tester.

Residents plug household and office appliances into the tester to determine electricity usage and the cost of running appliances. It also calculates the equivalent greenhouse gas emissions which is useful for the Low Carbon Diet program.

As part of council's Sustainability Awareness Program, Library staff attended a training session to learn how to measure and chart energy used by home and office appliances.

Council staff have held public workshops to explain how the appliance tester can be used. The EnergyWise toolkit includes a booklet with home EnergyWise tips, a grid graph and stickers.

The booklet covers energy-saving suggestions listing the best settings for operating fridges, freezers and air-conditioners.

Residents can borrow these EnergyWise toolkits from the Toowoomba City Library.

From the 1st September the Queensland Department of Environment and Resources will be making the kits available from all libraries in our region.

Sustainable Home Toowoomba – Located at 308 Ramsay Street, Toowoomba, the Sustainable Home recently celebrated 20,000 visits since opening almost two years ago.

Sustainable Home Toowoomba is part of the Sustainable Homes program and aims to provide communities across Queensland with display homes which incorporate principles of sustainable design and performance.

The homes provide practical examples of dwellings that aim to meet the triple bottom line concept of sustainability i.e. environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The Sustainable Homes program is a Queensland legacy of the National Year of the Built Environment 2004 (YBE) – a year that highlighted the need for our built environments to become more sustainable through improved design and function.

Two key objectives of the Sustainable Homes program are:

- to demonstrate and promote the importance of investment in sustainable design at the household and community level; and
- to increase the demand from home owners, builders and developers for sustainability practices.

The Toowoomba Home is open from 10am to 4pm every Wednesday and at weekends.

The Sustainable Housing Project Officer can arrange tours for groups at other times.

Residents who are building new homes or renovating can see examples of design principles and building products that are energy efficient and promote sustainable living.

Among the key features of the house are elements that:

1. Reduce water use

Water use in the sustainable home is reduced by an incredible 85% to 95% by using:

- Slow flow shower roses
- Dual flush (three/six litre) toilets
- Water efficient front load washing machines
- Water tanks to harvest rainwater for all outside uses and for the laundry, toilet, hot water service and dishwasher.

2. Reduce energy consumption

Reduced energy consumption means lower electricity bills and less dependence on non-renewable resources by using:

- Solar hot water systems
- Passive design to reduce heating and cooling costs by capturing the sun and breezes

- Roof, ceiling and wall insulation.

Plus other design methods that consider: Natural heating & cooling; an Efficient floor plan;

Materials for improving indoor air quality and reducing production energy;

Liveability & comfort;

Best use of the site;

Cost efficiency and ;

Reduced greenhouse gas emission.

To this end, the Sustainable Home demonstrates many of the Low Carbon behaviours outlined in the Low Carbon Diet book.

The Low Carbon Diet is a behaviour-change program that guides and challenges households to lose 2000kg of greenhouse gases in 30 days and adopt a more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Households can participate as individuals or as part of a peer support group of friends, neighbours, co-workers, or members of a faith community or civic organisation – an Eco Team.

The booklet highlights environmentally friendly lifestyle changes.

These practices complement the awareness and mitigation components which are two pillars in council's Climate Change Response Framework.

Ultimately, this project will reduce council's carbon footprint by mitigating greenhouse gases from landfill and will increase water and energy conservation in the Toowoomba region.

The Low Carbon Diet shows how all of us can adopt better energy-saving practices and real cost savings.

I encourage residents to join me by participating in the 30 day Challenge.

The Low Carbon Diet program has the potential to deliver achievable, measurable and lasting climate change mitigation for households in the Toowoomba region.