



WOMEN'S HEALTH
GOULBURN NORTH EAST

Women's Health Goulburn North East Members' Newsletter November 2009

Women, climate change...and the festive season



Christmas and Climate Change!

Can you do something for the environment and still have a great Christmas?

While climate change is a big problem, there are many little things we can do to make a difference not only now but in the future.

Many greenhouse gases are a result of the things we do every day, so let's consider some of the main issues around climate change and what we, as women can do at this busy time of year to look after our planet.

For many families in the Western world Christmas can be a time of excess: too much eating; too much drinking; too much money spent; too much stress; too much waste. Many of us consume more over the festive period than at any other time. **We can all make changes, big and small.**

"Women make 70% of purchasing decisions that determine household carbon footprint."

Quote from www.greencapital.org.au

TIPS FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Buy Australian Made where possible or **buy Fair Trade** gifts from Oxfam. Show friends, family and colleagues that you care for them and for the planet by giving presents that help others in need. Check out the wonderful gifts available at: <http://www.oxfam.org.au>. Consider "Oxfam Unwrapped" – where you can purchase safe refuge for women, a well, a clean water filter jar, food for a child, breakfast for an Indigenous child or support an Indigenous granny group. **Making your own presents** can be a great alternative to the commercialism of Christmas. Home made biscuits are easy and look fantastic in a nice glass jar. They are always appreciated.

Buy Christmas cards from a charity group and make your purchase count. Or **send a Giving Card**. A dollar from every card will be passed on to a community group of your choice. Find out more about the Giving Cards initiative at: www.ourcommunity.com.au/givingcards.

Try not to buy over packaged food. Food purchased at Christmas is a significant expense and food has a heavy environmental foot print because of the land, fertilizers, water, energy, transport, storage, processing and packaging needed for production and distribution. **Make a grocery list and stick to it.** A survey of 1,603 Australians, completed by the Australia Institute this month, revealed that Australian households throw out more than \$5 billion worth of food each year. This is more than Australians spend on digital equipment and more than it costs to run the Australian Army. The promotion of 'convenience foods' and the free provision of plastic shopping bags by some retailers highlights the manner in which some grocery outlets encourage customers to shop first and plan second.

Remember to dispose of your food scraps responsibly. When food waste is sent to landfill it breaks down without oxygen and produces methane, a greenhouse gas with more than 20 times the global warming capacity of carbon dioxide. The best way to dispose of food scraps is by composting or in worm farms.

Grow your own vegetables or **buy from Farmer's Markets**. Check out the website <http://100milediet.org> for ideas on eating locally produced food. The Victorian Farmers' Market promotes authentic farmers' markets throughout Victoria and lists upcoming markets on their website www.vicfarmersmarket.org.au There are also other fabulous websites with heaps of good advice on growing your own food and some councils have specific local information about growing vegetables on their websites. You may not have the time for a big vegetable patch but **even some lettuce seedlings in a pot will be ready for use in a few weeks time!**

TIPS FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE: cont.

Be responsible with your spending. The choices that you make while shopping can make a huge difference to the environment. Everything that we buy represents an investment in energy and water, and an output of greenhouse gases. You can download a copy of the **Festive Season Green Guide** from the Planet Ark website www.planetark.com which has tips on: buying green gifts; recycling or reusing your cards and wrapping paper; recycling at events and parties; reducing the amount of food that's wasted; saving energy and water when you travel; and information on recycling lots of different materials, ranging from batteries to aluminium cans and from glass bottles to computers.

Planet Ark supports a limited range of "greener" products for use all year round e.g. washing powder, toilet rolls, batteries.

These products offer a more environmentally responsible alternative to the commonly used products that are on the market.

Go to the Planet Ark website for a list of these products- www.planetark.com

Celebratory drinks and the festive season go hand in hand but you can enjoy a drink and still be green. Remember to recycle all your glass bottles and jars, aluminium cans and plastic drink bottles but remove the lids. Don't put window glass, Pyrex and drinking glasses in recycling as they are made from heat strengthened material, which melts at a higher temperature than bottles and jars. Even a small amount can contaminate tonnes of recyclable glass.

The Victorian Government has launched **ResourceSmart** online, a new website to help Victorians take action and shrink their impact on the environment.

Among the range of solutions, ideas and advice on the site, is information on rebates for energy and water saving devices, how and where to recycle and dispose of unwanted items and chemicals and useful tools that will assist in reducing greenhouse gas pollution. www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au

TIPS FOR AIR CONDITIONER USE

Most would consider air conditioning essential for Australian summers. Here are some energy saving tips to **get the most out of your air conditioner** and use the least amount of energy.

- **Minimise the area being cooled** shutting doors to unused rooms
- **Regularly clean filters**
- Set the thermostat between **23 and 25 degrees C** for optimum operation
- **Reduce the amount of heat entering the building** by shading windows and walls, insulating ceilings and walls and sealing draughts
- **Open up windows and external doors** if the outside temperature is lower than the inside temperature, instead of using the air conditioner.
- When a hot day is expected, **turn on the air conditioner early** rather than wait till the building becomes hot (it operates more efficiently when the outside air temperature is cooler).

And for women on low incomes who cannot afford an air conditioner remember that you may be eligible for a WHGNE No Interest Loan to assist your purchase. Ring us to see if you are eligible on 0357223009.

Women Gathering has been a theme for WHGNE for some years. We recognise that there are many health benefits to women gathering, particularly in relation to the coming festive and bushfire seasons, and the possibility of heat wave conditions over summer. As a result of trauma it has been found that women differ from men in their response to danger. Instead of the typical male response of 'fight-or-flight' women, after the initial danger is over, are inclined to 'tend-and-befriend.' So with this in mind WHGNE urge you to keep in touch with family, friends and neighbours, particularly the elderly and those with young children who are very vulnerable in extreme conditions.

Make sure your 'phone-tree' is up to date. A local phone call costs little but can mean a lot.

350

On 24 October 2009, people in 181 countries came together for the most widespread day of environmental action in the planet's history. At over 5200 events around the world, people gathered to call for a target of 350 parts per million (ppm) carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which scientists say is the safe limit for humanity. Currently in our atmosphere we are close to 390ppm. Some fantastic photos of these events can be found at www.350.org

The Women's Environment Network Australia

<http://wena.org.au>

The Women's Environment Network is an organisation that seeks to amplify women's voices for the environment. Women are commonly the most likely to respond to surveys concerned with the environment and represent the majority of people who actively volunteer on environmental projects. Yet this interest is not reflected in formal decision making settings. Their intention is to remedy this situation by supporting women to confidently **have a say on future directions** and let their voices and actions make a difference for the health of the environment.

You can measure your ecological footprint to see how the way you live is impacting on the planet and what you can do to reduce it. Log on to:

www.wwf.org.au/footprint

1 Million Women

An Australian campaign of daughters, mothers, sisters and grandmothers—committed to protecting our climate, our communities and our future and leading the change for better. Their goal is to inspire 1 million Australian women to take practical action on climate change by cutting 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse pollutant causing global warming. Every woman who joins has a personal goal to cut 1 tonne of carbon dioxide from her daily life within a year of joining the campaign.

Some of the carbon dioxide activities they suggest are: say 'no' to wasteful packaging, plastic bags and bottled water; reduce electricity use in your home each quarter by at least 5%; switch off appliances on 'stand-by' at the power point; use tele-conferencing to cut your work related car trips.

Go to their website: www.1millionwomen.com.au to find out more.

Take action with LivingGreener.gov.au This is an Australian Government website that provides another good starting point for information about living more sustainably and reducing your environmental impact. It includes information on government programs and financial support.

The **Boomerang Alliance** brings together Australia's leading environment groups to work for zero waste in Australia. The main focus of this alliance is the nationwide adoption of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** policies and practices to ensure that, eventually, all discarded products and packaging are either reused or recycled.

Their 2009 campaign is in high gear as the Australian Government moves to release a National Waste Policy.

For more info go to: www.Boomerangalliance.org.

TAKE ACTION. Contact your environment minister and make sure you let them know that you want Australia to stop dumping resources into waste dumps and to take action to protect the environment by comprehensive recovery and recycling schemes involving all producers.

The Victorian Environment Minister is Gavin Jennings gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Commonwealth Environment Minister is Peter Garrett

To send a portfolio-related email, go to www.aph.gov.au/P_Garrett_MP/ then click 'contact form'.

The 1 Million Women Campaign is presenting a series of national forums on Women in Climate Change, including one in Melbourne on 3rd December 2009. These forums coincide with the emissions trading scheme currently debated in Canberra and the decisive UN Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen in December. Leading women of Australia will offer their perspectives for climate policy, practical programs and activities that will mobilise women from all backgrounds and cultures to join in cutting CO2 pollution. **To find out more and to register, go to:** www.1millionwomen.com.au

Think Globally, recycle locally. The Freecycle Network provides an electronic forum to "recycle" unwanted items so as to reduce waste going to landfill. This network is particularly useful for those items that your local op-shop may not take e.g. left over building materials, superseded office equipment etc. It's a nonprofit movement of people who are giving (and getting) items for free in their own towns. Membership is free. When you want to find a new home for something you simply send an email offering it to members of the local Freecycle group. Or to acquire something yourself you just respond to a member's offer. Non-profit organizations also benefit from The Freecycle Network as you can post the items you want to give away and specify that you wish the gift to go to a nonprofit cause.

There are Freecycle Networks in the Hume region, including in Albury/Wodonga, Kilmore/Broadford, Murrindindi Shire, Shepparton and Wangaratta. Go to <http://freecycle.org> to find out more.

In accordance with the policies of the WHGNE Green Group we will be sending out our newsletter via email where possible. If you would prefer to continue to receive the newsletter in the post please call 0357223009 or email whealth@whealth.com.au and let us know your preference.

International Women and Climate Change

Women make up 70% of the world's poor. They are often the most vulnerable to the effect of climate change. 'Women in many developing countries are responsible for climatically sensitive tasks such as securing food, water and energy which ensure the food security and wellbeing of a household. The effects of climate change—droughts, floods, coastal erosion, sea level rise and rising temperatures—will put greater pressure on women to shoulder the adverse consequences on the household.

Women often have unequal access to information and resources, and are underrepresented in decision-making which makes them even more vulnerable to natural disasters and extreme weather events. Despite women's vulnerabilities, women's knowledge and social practices could be used to build community resilience if women were included in adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Yet the impacts of climate change on women are not a mainstream focus in the key international agreements on climate change such as the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change. All key decision-making institutions related to climate change have a male-dominated hierarchical structure.' (Aguilar 2007)

Gender, climate change and natural disasters

By Kellie Tranter Abridged from On Line opinion 4 February 2008

The recent spate of "natural" disasters (some of which are "climate related", some are not) all over the world caused me to wonder whether their effects are evenly spread between the sexes. Logically, human beings of both sexes should react in much the same way to environmental threats, and any differences in the effect of disasters between the sexes should be fairly small.

I was interested to turn up some research that has already been done. I was appalled at what it showed: more women die than men as the direct and indirect result of natural disasters; 90 per cent of the 140,000 victims of the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone disasters were women; more women than men died during the 2003 European heat wave; and the 2006 tsunami killed three to four women for each man.

How could that be so? Some interesting patterns emerged when I went digging.

In Sri Lanka, swimming and tree climbing are taught mainly to boys; this helped males cope better than females, and allowed more to survive when the waves of the tsunami hit. Social prejudice keeps girls and women from learning to swim, which severely reduces their chances of survival in flooding disasters.

Women often stay indoors because of social prohibitions against leaving home.

In Aceh many women were found dead with babies still clutched in their arms. Some personal accounts by survivors tell of mothers pushing their children to safety on to buildings or up trees that withstood the tsunami, but were then swept away themselves. The long dresses women are obliged to wear under Aceh's shariah laws made it harder to move quickly. They could not run as fast as men, nor could they swim.

There were stories of some women, who were in their homes but casually dressed when the first wave struck, who ran to put on "acceptable" outdoor clothes before seeking safety, and as a result were drowned or barely escaped.

In times of disaster and environmental stress women become less mobile because they are the primary caregivers.

After a natural disaster, women are more likely to become victims of domestic and sexual violence. They often avoid using shelters out of fear. The household workload increases substantially after a disaster, which forces many girls to drop out of school to help with chores.

Nutritional status is a critical determinant of the ability to cope with the effect of natural disasters. Women are more prone to nutritional deficiencies because of their unique nutritional needs. Some cultures have household food hierarchies, generally favouring males. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women carry greater loads than men, but have a lower intake of calories because the cultural norm is for men to receive more food.

Women plant, produce, procure and prepare most of the world's food: women are responsible for about 75 per cent of household food production in Sub-Saharan Africa; 65 per cent in Asia; and 45 per cent in Latin America.

The time-consuming task of gathering and transporting water generally falls to women. As water becomes scarce, women's workload increases dramatically. Girls' school attendances, and eventually enrolments, drop as they trek longer distances to find water.

From the information I was able to access it seemed to me that the ways in which women are affected more than men is fairly consistently associated with their care giving obligations or with cultural or religious mores.

Kellie Tranter is a lawyer, writer and immediate past Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Legislation for BPW International. Since establishing her own legal practice seven years ago she has dedicated much of her time to promoting social, environmental and political responsibility, to calls for government and business accountability, and to speaking out for the underprivileged and voiceless. Her environmental and human rights activism has been recognised by the Women's Electoral Lobby, Business & Professional Women and the Women Lawyers Association of NSW. Most recently, Kellie delivered addresses and chaired workshops on the issues of gender and climate change at the Business & Professional Women's 2008 International Conference in Mexico City directed to empowering women globally to stand up and be heard on issues that will affect the future of all of us.

To read the full article go to: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=6948>