



CARING FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

7.0

An A to Z of Environmental Actions

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Why should we care about the environment? One simple answer is that it is in our self-interest to do so. Healthy communities and healthy economies depend on a healthy environment. However, a healthy environment can only be attained if everybody pitches in. Governments alone can't solve the complex environmental problems we face, nor can industries. In many cases, the solutions to our environmental problems are not technological or scientific, but are behavioural. In other words, the solutions are dependent on how we behave on a day-to-day basis.

This chapter contains a listing of many things each of us can do to make the environment healthier. Some of these actions are relatively easy to carry out, some more difficult. Some will appeal to many, others to a few. It is our hope that everyone can incorporate some of these ideas into their lives. Collectively, we can make a great deal of difference. The list is not intended to be prescriptive, nor is it by any means complete. It is intended to challenge and inspire.

An A to Z of Environmental Actions

Adopt your local stream or park. Many community groups in the Region have "adopted" local streams and parks. This can involve helping to keep them clean, planting trees and shrubs, building or maintaining trails and keeping an eye on these resources.

Buy local produce. Supporting local farmers is good for the regional economy, and will provide you with top quality, fresh vegetables and fruit. Regional farmers produce significant amounts of the celery, onions, carrots, lettuce, spinach and broccoli grown in Ontario.

Conserve water outside your home. Wash your car sparingly, and water your lawn once a week in the summer months. Installing a rainbarrel or cistern will provide cool, clean water for watering plants, and will help reduce stormwater impacts on local streams and rivers.

Drive your car less. Take the bus, car pool, bike or walk instead. Cars are the greatest source of the pollutants that form smog. Reducing your car use will help improve our air quality and reduce the number of Air Quality Advisories we experience in the Region.

Eliminate the use of hazardous products in your home where you can. These include solvents, aerosols, and solvent-based paints and polishes. In many cases, non-toxic, water-based alternatives are available that do the same job, without exposing you or the environment to toxic substances.

Foster stewardship. Caring for the environment is everyone's responsibility. You can help by setting an example on your own property and by talking to your friends and family.

Go fishing. The Region's rivers, streams, ponds and lakes support dozens of cold and warmwater species of fish. Practice catch and release, and consult the Ministry of the Environment's Guide to Eating Sport Fish about how much you can eat.

Help to celebrate the Region's resources by taking part in activities during Environment Week, Earth Day, or Watershed Week. Many individuals and businesses have incorporated such events into their annual calendars.

Install water-saving devices in your home. Installing low flow showerheads, toilet dams or low flow toilets can save you many litres a day. Conserving water reduces the cost of municipal water and wastewater treatment, and reduces impacts on local water bodies. For those on water meters, conserving water means saving dollars.

Join a local environment or conservation group. Many non-governmental organizations need volunteers to carry out projects such as monitoring populations of amphibians and birds, planting trees and restoring streams. Your involvement can help organizations meet their goals and can make a tangible difference in the health of the environment.

Keep your car in good working order. Regular maintenance and tuning (including checking tire pressure) will reduce your car's emissions, improve its fuel efficiency, and save you money on repair bills over the long term.

Learn about the natural history and cultural heritage of York Region. The Region contains many unique and beautiful natural areas, and a wealth of heritage buildings. Learning about what makes the Region special will increase your appreciation of the place we call home.

Make a compost pile. Instead of throwing out your leaves, grass clippings, fruit and vegetable wastes, make a compost heap or get a composter. Composting dramatically reduces the amount of solid waste that needs to be sent to landfill. The end product, compost, can be used in your garden to improve the soil and the plants growing in it.

Naturalize your lawn, garden, schoolyard or local park. Green spaces don't all have to be lawns. Planting native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees on your property, in schoolyards or in parks will reduce the amount of water needed, the amount of energy used for mowing, and the need for pesticides and fertilizer.

Organize a litter clean up day in your neighbourhood or at your place of work. Helping to clean up your neighbourhood will make it more beautiful and healthy, and is a great way to get involved in stewardship activity.

Plant a tree. Planting trees on your property, beside a stream, or in a reforestation area is a wonderful way to improve the environment. Planting trees will help improve local air quality, reduce global warming, and make our surroundings more beautiful.

Quit using pesticides on your lawn. Eliminating the use of pesticides will reduce inputs to local streams and rivers, and protect beneficial plants, insects, earthworms and birds. Join the millions of homeowners who have opted to dig up dandelions, or live with them.

Reduce, re-use and recycle. You can lessen your impact on the environment by reducing the purchase of unnecessary or overpackaged items. Re-using bottles, glass jars, grocery bags and other products and buying refillable containers also helps greatly. Recycling glass, tin, paper and other materials at home and at work is an easy way to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Save energy. You can dramatically reduce the energy you use by weather-stripping your doors and windows, lowering your thermostat at night and turning off lights when you don't need them. By saving energy, you'll help improve air quality, reduce global warming and save money.

Take public transit. Taking transit instead of driving your car is a great way to reduce pollution. It can also be a relaxing way to get to work or school, and will give you time to catch up on reading or preparation.

Use environmentally-friendly products where you can. Look on labels for Canada's "Environmental Choice" logo. Where possible, buy paper and plastic products made from recycled materials and wood products from companies that use sustainable forest practices.

Value the natural resources of the Region and support the Regional policies that aim to protect them. The Region's forests, wetlands, groundwater, rivers, streams, lakes, landforms and wildlife are precious and unique, and contribute greatly to our quality of life.

Walk to school or work, or take a walk on one of the many walking and hiking trails that dot the Region. Walking (rather than driving) is good for the environment and your health. Walking is one of the best forms of exercise available.

eXplore the Region's wonderful natural areas. Take a nature walk, have a picnic, or go birdwatching in one of the Region's Conservation Areas, beaches, lakes or forests. Check out your local wetland, or explore the beauty of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Enjoy the natural legacy that surrounds us.

Yell if you see a chemical spill. Call the Ministry of the Environment Spills Action Centre (open 24 hours a day at 1-800-268-6060) if you see a spill on the ground or in a stream. The Ministry will investigate and ensure that clean up takes place.

Zip around on your bike. Every year, more biking trails are built in the Region. Getting around by bike is good exercise, and you won't have to worry about parking your car.

