

Earth Hour 2009

BY EVE ASPINALL
MEMBER OF THE HEALTHY CITY PROJECT

A year has gone by since our first attempt to keep up with the rest of the world (150 cities in 50 different countries) by lowering our use of hydroelectric power for one hour on one day of the year.

Last year, we lowered our consumption by 1 percent. Sydney, Australia, where the initiative for this worldwide idea sprang to life in 2007, has consistently achieved a 15 percent drop.

A view of Westmount from the Lookout was disheartening – the area above The Boulevard was ablaze with light, residents in the mid-level had intermittently turned their lights off and lower Westmount was quite dark. Many of the houses on the upper slopes have a proliferation of lights to highlight their facades. This not only consumes energy, but contributes to the light pollution that prevents us from seeing the stars.

On March 28, Earth Hour takes place from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm. How can we do better?

Ideally, if all citizens would observe this one hour by turning off all electrical appliances, we would achieve a much larger drop in our energy use. As a bonus, we

might see a remarkable change in the night sky.

Some people said that last year they forgot the time or the date. How about marking your calendars and setting your alarm clocks?

While Earth Hour is a symbolic gesture, it is also an exercise to remind us of our extravagant use of energy that contributes to global warming.

It can demonstrate to us how we can incorporate some of the actions into our daily lives. Some of the activities that are being planned for Earth Hour in Westmount can foster a sense of community and a commitment to a greener city. Westmount still leaves one of the heaviest footprints of any city in Canada. This is quite shameful. We owe it to the world to lessen this blot on our reputation.

How much can each one of you do to make this hour a spectacular success?

Elliott new Scouts commissioner



Virginia Elliott

The city of Westmount's assistant community events coordinator, Virginia Elliott, was recently appointed to be Stoney Point area commissioner for Scouts Canada succeeding Mark Brenchley. The area covers Lachine to downtown. Said Elliott, "I am the go-to person for the leaders who are out there every week running the programs. I am there to give them a hand."

Westmounters praise pact

Large-scale composting gets boost

The future looks green for composting in Quebec.

An unprecedented agreement was signed on February 17 by a province-wide group of municipalities and environmental groups. It is meant to accelerate the large-scale biological composting of organic materials in Westmount and elsewhere.

The pact promises industrial-scale facilities that, in three years, will compost 60 percent of urban Quebec's putrescible materials. Industry, commerce, institutions – sectors that produce more than residents, but have not been catered to by most municipalities – will be invited to participate.

The signatories for local governments were headed by Montreal mayor Gérald Tremblay, acting as president of the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM); his Quebec City counterpart, Régis Labeaume; and the presidents of both the Union and the Federation of Quebec Municipalities.

Formal endorsement for the environmentalists was given by Lysianne Panagis of Action RE-buts, the Montreal group that was at the heart of the resistance to a 1993 mega-incinerator project, and Jacques Ruelland, president of Quebec's environmental councils.

About 40 percent of the contents of Quebec's garbage bags are compostable. Last year, the province lagged behind its neighbours in diversions from landfills. Greater Montreal, which converted less than 10 percent of the possible total, has been particularly lax.

Activist, mayor see Westmount opportunity

Local activists point out that a likely result of the new consensus is avoiding a repetition of the great public disquiet over the mega-incinerator proposals of the early 1990s. "We don't want another incinerator or another three-year battle over it," said Westmount's Healthy City Project's environment chair Jenny Patton. "The emphasis of turning waste into compost is exactly the way to go.

"It is much too valuable as a resource to go to a landfill or be burnt. The new approach means Montreal is joining the trend to bio-mimicry where end-of-life products are being returned back to the earth in a useful form."

Also welcoming the move was Westmount mayor Karin Marks, a vocal opponent of Montreal's grandiose plans for large-scale waste-handling plants. She noted that municipalities in other regions were expecting financing of facilities scaled to their size.

"We on the island should have the same right," she said. "Composting plants like some of those in Halifax might serve our needs – alone or in small partnerships with neighbours."

The deal is framed around a request to the government for infrastructure funding to construct facilities to biologically treat the vast-quantities of material expected to become available as Westmount-type kitchen and green waste collection becomes standard across the province.

Gasification emphasis gone

Until late last year, the CMM had been planning large-scale construction and use of gasification plants – a modern form of incineration – as well as some composting facilities.

Its projected cost was \$1.1 billion, but its request for that scale of funding fell on deaf government ears. The proposed new compost plants are said to cost about \$300 million.

Last fall, the Conseil régional de l'environnement de Montréal (CRE) launched a campaign aimed at the gasification proposals. Others also had complaints.

At the time, Côte St. Luc was launching its kitchen waste collection for all its 4,800 houses. The two CSL councillors responsible for that program both have strong connections: Steven Erdelyi is the new vice-principal of Westmount High and Dida Berku is a lawyer with an office on Sherbrooke St. in Westmount. The duo publicly raised the issue of Montreal's tardiness in providing composting plants and joined in the CRE campaign.

At its peak, CMM director-general Massimo Iezzoni contacted the CRE with a view to forming a common front to apply for government funding and get the project moving.

He was told by the CRE that nothing was possible as long as gasification was the principal technique being used. Subsequently, negotiations spread to the wide partnership, resulting in the agreement.

"Gasification" was a word ignored by all parties.

Notice to readers

The column "Earth Hour now!" that appeared in the February 24 *Independent* (p. 4) under Eve Aspinall's byline was not meant for publication. Due to an inadvertent email error, the wrong article was received by the *Independent* in place of the intended column.

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