
YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR A GREEN UNION – CUPE ONTARIO’S CLIMATE JUSTICE TOOLKIT

Your Blueprint for a Green Union is a toolkit for taking action on the environment in your local. CUPE Ontario’s Climate Justice committee urges locals to take the ideas in this tool kit and use them as part of a collective approach to tackling climate change.

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Climate change is a health and safety issue.

Among the many ways that workers can address new and increased risks brought on by climate change is through tackle them through our joint health and safety committees. Through JHSCs, we can identify ways to adapt our workplaces and form can form environmental committees to support that adaptation and help reduce our carbon footprints.

Workers are on the front lines of the climate crisis. We should be on the front lines building solutions too.

1. Bargaining

There is a wealth of resources for locals that want to integrate action on climate change into their bargaining. Check out these links:

CUPE: Bargaining language for a greener workplace
<https://cupe.ca/bargaining-language-greener-workplace>

CAUT: Climate Change & Collective Bargaining
https://council.caut.ca/sites/default/files/10.ij.doc.4.caut-bargaining-advisory-climate-change-and-collective-bargaining-2017-05_0.pdf

PSAC: PSAC in the fight for climate action
<https://psacunion.ca/psac-fight-climate-action-and-just-transition>

2. How to Start a Green Team/Climate action committee

Any workplace and local can set up an environmental sustainability committee right now! And we want to help!

- Form an environment or Climate Justice committee! It can be at your workplace and/or within your union local.
- Write a climate change policy for your workplace.
- A workplace policy could cover:
 - A broad statement on how your workplace will strive to reduce its negative environmental impact and make changes to improve its environmental record.
 - How sustainability will underscore your work.
 - Climate change: the policy should set a target for greenhouse gas reductions and spell out how those targets will be met.
 - Conservation: the policy should emphasize conservation and efficient use of all workplace resources. For example, establish strict heating and cooling levels to ensure energy is not wasted. Set up programs to ensure that equipment not in use is turned off during the day and at the end of the day.
 - Waste reduction: your workplace should have a thorough and effective waste reduction program.

- Air quality: your workplace should strive to minimize emissions of harmful air pollutants from all sources (e.g., from vehicles and transportation, materials off-gassing, cleaning products and solvents).
- Hazardous substances: your workplace should not use hazardous cleaning products, pesticides, and other substances that damage the air, water and soil. This may be something you can negotiate language around.

Use this CUPE guide to start making change in your workplace:

- Healthy, Clean & GREEN: A Workers' Action Guide to a Greener Workplace https://cupe.ca/sites/default/files/green_booklet_0.pdf
- How to form a Workplace Environment Committee <https://cupe.ca/how-form-workplace-environment-committee>
- Do an eco-audit using this CUPE National tool: <https://cupe.ca/cupe-eco-audit-0>

More tips:

- Set greenhouse gas (GHG) cutting strategies for your workplace. For example, look where you can make changes at work around transportation and energy use to cut greenhouse gasses.
- Start conservation programs at work. For example, educate your co-workers on conserving electricity by turning off unnecessary equipment and lights to conserve power.
- Don't idle car, truck or vehicle engines. This will reduce CO2 emissions while working. Many CUPE jobs involve driving.
- Set up or expand workplace recycling and composting programs to cut waste.
- If your workplace uses a pod-coffee maker, purchase reusable pods for everyone to use and compost the coffee grounds (or collect them in a container in the freezer for people to take home and add to their gardens!).
- Doing environmental audits can help you identify areas where improvements could be made.
- Be proactive in changing products or working-styles to ones that have less environmental impact.
- Do environmental audits to find areas at work that could be made more efficient and less climate damaging.

More advice from CUPE: Set up a [Workplace Environment Committee](#), Green Team or Workplace Sustainability Squad either formally or informally, that can meet to come up with a plan and engage their colleagues in fun ways!

- A Workplace Waste Audit is a great place to start. Assess waste generation at

your workplace to determine what things are being thrown out, and look for solutions that can reduce the amounts of those items going to landfill.

- Create solutions. These can include: guidelines for using fewer resources to generate less waste (for example, set up a program that cuts the use of disposable products/materials to an absolute minimum); recycling programs; reusing programs (for example, can you donate materials so that they do not end up in landfill?); composting programs for food waste.
- Educate workers so that the solutions work. For example, don't assume workers are familiar with recycling or composting programs. Educate them and they will participate. Show them why eliminating disposable and unnecessary products is vital to reducing waste.
- Monitor the solutions to see if they work. Has waste been cut back? Are workers participating? If not, why?
- Keep the momentum going! Make further changes to keep the programs lively and challenging. Waste reduction and diversion is an ongoing activity where improvements are always possible!
- Book an educational tour at a nearby Waste Management facility. See what the conditions are like for the workers, and how the facility processes waste. Make it a team-building activity for your coworkers or enviro committee—the workers there may have suggestions on how you can improve your workplace recycling and waste reduction initiatives!

3. Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) Issues: How to identify climate-related issues in the workplace

(Adapted from CUPE's Economy at Work)

Weather/heat related issues

As our planet warms, so do our workplaces—and this can create hazardous working conditions, especially for our CUPE members who work outdoors. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can happen easily. People with certain disabilities or health conditions are more susceptible than others. Our collective agreements need to reflect the changing nature of our working conditions, and provide protection for all workers against working in any hazardous condition.

Climate change has also exacerbated the rate at which large-scale weather events such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc., are happening all over Ontario, in areas where these events were historically infrequent. Language in our collective agreements needs to be reflective and responsive to the unpredictability of our working and living conditions during this time of rapid change and unpredictable weather events. Paid "Disaster Relief" days, limitations on outdoor work based on wind-speed, and proper workplace disaster response protocols are examples of how bargaining units can negotiate proactive language. A related story appears [here](#).

Workers restoring power or organizing evacuation and relief efforts after storms are an example of climate change making our jobs more demanding and dangerous. Health care workers are seeing increased workloads because of heatwaves and respiratory illnesses caused by air pollution from wildfires and longer pollen seasons. People who normally work outside are affected by heatwaves, air pollution, and the increased risk of insect-borne diseases.

Greener chemicals/cleaning supplies are less hazardous to workers

The COVID-19 pandemic brought shortages of some common disinfection agents such as bleach and rubbing alcohol—a situation none of us want to be faced with again. Workers can advocate for adequate stores of non-expired PPE and disinfection supplies, but also have an opportunity to change their supplies to ones that are less toxic or have fewer associated health risks.

Workers on JHSC committees can advocate, and even negotiate, for the use of cleaning and disinfection products and PPE supplies that have less impact to the ecosystem and supplies that are produced domestically, by unionized workers. There are other issues too, like supporting green transportation, public transit which also supports transit workers, transit construction and the installation of green energy alternatives.

How you can involve your Joint Health and Safety Committees

Environmentalists and labour activists highlight the need to invest in training and good jobs for workers who will be displaced as our economy transitions away from fossil fuels. But there's less focus on other ways the climate crisis is a workers' issue such as health and safety. Consequences of climate change include more intense storms and flooding, more frequent forest fires and heatwaves, and increased risk of illnesses carried by mosquitos or ticks. These are concerns for everyone – but for many workers, these represent new or increased health and safety risks on the job.

Many CUPE members work in emergency and security services, health care, municipal services, communications and social services. Over the past 30 years, these services have faced cutbacks, downsizing, mergers, amalgamations, and privatization. On top of this ongoing austerity, the consequences of climate change have begun to change how we work in different ways, depending on where you live and what you do at work.

Public policy

There are simple, concrete actions governments can take to help fight climate change and support improved health and safety for workers. Retrofitting public buildings will create jobs, reduce energy use, and deliver healthier work environments. Municipalities will need to invest in infrastructure to address changing weather patterns, including restoring wetlands, building berms to protect against flooding, or upgrading water infrastructure. Commuting to work needs to be affordable, safe, and less stressful. In our cities, public transit should be regular, reliable, and cheap. In rural areas and in between cities, we need to expand public solutions like the [Saskatchewan Transportation Company](#), rather than shutting them down as the current provincial government has done.

4. Equality and Equity Work

The struggle for climate justice is linked to the struggles for racial, gender and economic justice. Climate change impacts everyone, but Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities are impacted more harshly. Find out more:

[Environmental Racism work with CBTU](#)
[Water is Life Campaign](#)

5. Calls to Action for Locals

These actions can help your local kickstart your climate justice work:

i) Resolution language for Locals:

Whereas

- The climate emergency is real and has devastating impacts on workers
- To ensure human survival we must challenge the powerful corporate interests that drive the current unsustainable economic model and seek to sabotage effective climate action. At the same time, we must show the opportunities to build prosperity and justice for all.

Therefore [LABOUR BODY] will:

- create a Climate Emergency Action Plan identifying timelines, deliverables, and who is assigned

ii) Have your local adopt CUPE's [Climate Change Emergency Declaration](#)

iii) Bargaining for the Common Good: Proposals around Climate Change and the Environment:

- Signing onto Joint Environment and Climate Change Agreements
- reduce carbon footprint through quantified and transparent annual targets
- work with staff, management and parties on training and awareness raising
- Electrify fleet vehicles
- Adding climate emergency check-ins to every JHSC agenda
- Access to clean drinking water for the community
- Environmental products and green alternatives

iv) Bargain an environment committee for your workplace

The committee would be responsible for conducting workplace environmental audits, which assess the environmental impact of work. They also look for ways to improve a workplace's environmental practices.

Set a workplace environmental policy that could cover:

- A broad statement on how your workplace will strive to reduce its negative environmental impact and make changes to improve its environmental record.

- How sustainability will underscore your work.
- Climate change: the policy should set a target for greenhouse gas reductions and spell out how those targets will be met.

What can you and your local do?

Speak up at work, within your union, at home and in your community about climate change. Tell people why climate change must be dealt with right away. Let them know what you're doing and what actions they can take.

6. Additional Resources

A selection of resources on tackling climate change:

Climate anxiety: What we think about when we try not to think about Global Warming by Per Espen Stoknes

The Nature of Things <https://gem.cbc.ca/the-nature-of-things/s62?autoplay=1>

Seth Klein, "A Good War." <https://www.sethklein.ca/book>

[Generation Dread: Finding purpose in a time of climate crisis](#) by Britt Wray

[CUPE Cast: 2022: The Dumpster is on Fire, but so is the Planet on Apple Podcasts](#)

[Our Future Re-Imagined CUPE Connects Webisode](#)

[CUPE adopts new environmental policy | Canadian Union of Public Employees](#)

[Bargaining language for a greener workplace | Canadian Union of Public Employees \(cupe.ca\)](#)

[How to form a Workplace Environment Committee | Canadian Union of Public Employees \(cupe.ca\)](#)

[Climate change is a health and safety issue | Canadian Union of Public Employees \(cupe.ca\)](#)

[Just Transition: Why we need to look before we leap | Canadian Union of Public Employees \(cupe.ca\)](#)

[Eco-Audit: Calculate your score | Canadian Union of Public Employees \(cupe.ca\)](#)

[CUPE's green workplace guide | Canadian Union of Public Employees](#)

[Green Economy Network – A coalition of labour, environmental, and social justice organizations working to build a green economy in Canada](#) (many good resources here)

[Microsoft Word - No 65 - App 3 - COP15 TUstatement Final EN.doc \(ituc-csi.org\)](#)

[cop_26_en-2.pdf \(ituc-csi.org\)](#) (more up-to-date ITUC position which builds in inequality more than earlier statements)

[Climate Crisis - PSI - The global union federation of workers in public services](#) (emphasis on public sector solutions)

[Why Climate Change matters to trade unions | EPSU](#) (good fundamental concepts here)

[Final FUPA Guide EN.pdf \(etuc.org\)](#) (examples of actions that unions can take)

[GoGreen_0.pdf \(tuc.org.uk\)](#) (straightforward examples of steps unions can take)

[On-line-Catalogue173553.pdf \(unison.org.uk\)](#) (mix of policy and workplace actions)

[Labor Network for Sustainability – Helping unions and their allies advance a climate action program that is ecologically sustainable and economically just. - Labor Network for Sustainability \(labor4sustainability.org\)](#) (an American umbrella group centred on labour and environmental issues)

[Putting Climate Justice on the Bargaining Table: Labour and the Green New Deal](#)

7. Case Study “Green Jobs Oshawa”

A resource package that offers an analysis of Green Jobs Oshawa.

Green Jobs Oshawa specific analysis and primer

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MJZonl0mQQwhnrfaGr5yRTyFTX-612pcXEd8K9WmbUk/edit>

8. CUPE resources for climate action

Use these resources to inform, educate and get started on climate action for your local.

- CUPE's Climate Change tool goes online <https://cupe.ca/cupes-climate-change-tool-goes-online>
- How to lead a workplace discussion on climate change - <https://cupe.ca/how-lead-workplace-discussion-climate-change>
- CUPE's environmental policy, Working harmoniously on the earth https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/cupe_environmental_policy_2021_eng.pdf

9. Glossary of terms

Bargaining for the Common Good: consciously attempting to transcend the traditional bargaining frameworks that are written into law, unions and community allies are jointly crafting bargaining demands and are thinking of individual campaigns as steps in a long-term strategy of worker and citizen empowerment. Rather than *coalitions* in which unions recruit community allies to support their pre-formulated demands in a transactional relationship that usually dissolves at the end of a campaign, these allies seek something different. They try to build enduring *alignments* that accumulate lasting power over time through campaign victories, a shared and increasingly fleshed out infrastructure, and a common vision and narrative; these efforts have proceeded on the assumption that collective action and occasionally, even civil disobedience, will likely be necessary if workers and citizens are to reverse the powerful trends that have been promoting inequality and undermining democracy. (McCartin, J. A., 2016, Bargaining for the common good, Dissent Magazine <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/bargaining-common-good-community-union-alignment>)

Carbon Capture and Storage: CCS involves the capture of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from industrial processes, such as steel and cement production, or from the burning of fossil fuels in power generation. This carbon is then transported from where it was produced, via ship or in a pipeline, and stored deep underground in geological formations.

Climate Justice: concept that addresses the just distribution of the benefits and burdens of climate change and responsibilities to deal with the climate emergency. "Climate justice" is a term, and more than that a movement, that acknowledges climate change can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on underprivileged populations.

(Simmons, D., 2022, What is 'climate justice'?, Yale Climate Connections <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/07/what-is-climate-justice/>)

Colonization: establishing of a colony or subjugation of a people or area especially as an extension of state power; migration to and settlement in an inhabited or uninhabited area; the act or practice of appropriating something that one does not own or have a right to; the state of being colonized: subjugation by a foreign power. ([Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonization))

Disaster Capitalism: A term created by Naomi Klein, which occurs when private interests descend on a particular region in the wake of major destabilizing events, such as war, government upheaval, and natural disaster. "It's really an extension of the military industrial complex, but it isn't just warfare; it's responses to disasters," Klein explains. "It's the reconstruction afterwards."

Emissions: Emissions are substances that are emitted in an [energy](#) sense; these are most often [waste](#) products of a process aimed at obtaining useful [work](#). The most common emissions from energy are associated with the generation of [electricity](#) and the [transportation](#) of people and goods. The specific chemical nature of the emissions depends on how those tasks were done. (energyeducation.ca/encyclopedia/Energy)

Environment or Climate Action Committee: Workplace environment committees deal with environmental issues in the workplace. Like other workplace committees that have specialized interests, an environment committee looks at ways to improve the environmental record of the workplace.

Environmental Racism: Benjamin Chavis, a Black civil rights leader from the United States in 1982 first coined the term Environmental racism and defined the term as “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of colour from leadership of the ecology movements.” Environmental racism is a result of the ongoing process of colonization in Canada. Examples of environmental racism that we see in Canada include BIPOC workers especially migrant workers in low-wage paying jobs experiencing high levels of exposure to toxic chemicals in the workplace, hazardous pollution sites near BIPOC communities, drinking water advisories in Indigenous communities and reserves and much more. (*Climate change and human rights*. Global Policy Journal, 2020, www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/04/08/2020/what-environmental-racism)

Green Economy: A green economy is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive, still operating within capitalism.

Green New Deal: Introduced in the United States, Green New Deal (GND) proposals call for public policy to address climate change along with achieving other social aims like job creation and reducing economic inequality. The name refers back to the New Deal in the United States, a set of social and economic reforms and public works projects undertaken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression. The Green New Deal combines Roosevelt’s economic approach with modern ideas such as renewable energy and resource efficiency.

Greenwashing: the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear to be more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it really is

Just Transition: a framework for change and addressing the climate emergency through a worker-led lens. A Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy or beyond.

Procurement: The process of obtaining products and services which are favorably disposed toward the environment.

Sustainability: According to the United Nations (UN) World Commission on Environment and Development, environmental sustainability is about acting in a way that ensures future generations have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations.

While it may not be universally accepted, the UN's definition is pretty standard and has been expanded over the years to include perspectives on human needs and well-being, including non-economic variables, such as education and health, clean air and water, and the protection of natural beauty.

- **Alternate definition:** Environmental sustainability is the capacity to improve the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the earth's supporting ecosystems.
- **Alternate definition:** Environmental sustainability is about stabilizing the currently disruptive relationship between earth's two most complex systems: human culture and the living world.

The first alternate definition comes from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the work of which is driven by the fact that global production and consumption patterns are destroying nature at persistent and dangerously high rates.

The second alternate definition was provided by environmentalist Paul Hawken, who has written about the realization (and the science behind it) that we are using and destroying the earth's resources faster than they can be regenerated and replenished.

Waste or Eco Audit: A waste audit is a systematic review of all waste that is generated within a workplace. An Eco Audit is assessing how environmentally sustainable the practices in your workplace is.