

Wake Up Canada: Put on the Coffee, Your Slippers and Work from Home!

Let's think about global warming, from the perspective of how we get to work, since going back and forth from our homes to the workplace is one of the main reasons we travel each day. Road transportation represents the largest single source of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. The discourse about reducing emissions seems to focus on developing cleaner and renewable energy sources and finding more efficient ways for people to get to work. In *Small is Beautiful*, published in 1973, E.F. Schumacher chastised us for not "studying the possibilities of alternative methods of production and patterns of living — so as to get off the collision course on which we are moving with ever-increasing speed". While hoping that eco-focused energy programs will reduce emissions, we seem to be overlooking an obvious option for changing our patterns of living. *What about encouraging more Canadians to drive less by working from home?*

Given escalating concerns about global warming and the need for Canada to do its part to reduce emissions, it is surprising that there has not been more discussion about the potential environmental benefits of working from home. Using telework/telecommuting as a means to help reduce commuting related emissions makes a lot of sense. There are additional environmental benefits that could result from reduced oil exploration and production.

Commuting also contributes to workers' psychological stress and accounts for hours of lost productivity. In *What Canadians Think*, Darrell Bricker and John Wright of Ipsos-Reid (2005) report that 42% of Canadians are rubbed the wrong way by traffic related issues, and that 42% of Canadians would welcome an opportunity to work from home one day a week. Telework and other flexible work options benefit both employees and employers in a number of ways. Employers benefit from their enhanced ability to attract, engage and retain skilled workers. Studies show that many people leave the traditional work force in favor of self-employment because they prefer flexible work hours and the opportunity to work from home. Employees benefit from reduced stress because they are better able to manage worklife challenges. As a bonus, reduced stress levels typically increase an employee's productivity at work.

While telework is not an option that works for everyone, or in every job situation, it is a strategy that can have a positive impact for the environment, employees and employers. We have the technology required to work effectively from home, and many Canadians are already interested in doing so one day a week. As individuals *we can make a difference* by challenging our employers to utilize telework and other flexible work options to help address one of our key environmental challenges — the impact of greenhouse gas emissions in global warming.

Charlene Levis, principal of the management consulting firm WorkLife® Innovations, works flexible hours at her home office in Kamloops, BC.
worklife@telus.net)250.374.6826