



Yasodhara Ashram
YOGA RETREAT & STUDY CENTRE

Monday, November 12, 2012

**Leading by Example:
Yasodhara Ashram Lightens its Ecological Footprint**

Background

Yasodhara Ashram is now officially Carbon Neutral – the successful culmination of a five-year plan to address the global warming crisis.

What does it mean to be Carbon Neutral?

It's a process of measuring the amount of carbon released and balancing this with an equal amount of carbon credits in order to create a 'carbon neutral' outcome.

History/Process

In 2007, the Ashram began to develop a strategy to move beyond an environmental stewardship program that had evolved over the previous two decades from the simple 3-R's—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle—approach. The result was a community-wide commitment to be carbon neutral by 2013, the Ashram's 50th anniversary.

In 2008, using the David Suzuki Foundation's "Doing Business in A New Climate" as a guide, the Ashram started to inventory greenhouse gas emissions in all areas of its operations—from the ordering of kitchen, housekeeping and office supplies to the consumption of electricity, propane, gas and diesel fuels. Over the following 4 years, using international protocols for GHG accounting, a successive set of reduction strategies was developed and implemented. This included a shift in local food sourcing and menu planning and converting Mandala House (the main services building) from a waste-oil furnace to an integrated geothermal/solar heating and domestic hot water system.

Benefits

- Financial Impact and Guest Experience

At each stage of this Greenhouse Gas reduction program, it became apparent that financial benefits were emerging.

Many of the measures also enhanced the quality of the Ashram experience. Arlene Trustham, a volunteer who led the final phases of the program, cited an example, saying "Refocusing the menus to local and seasonal items not only decreased costs, it also better focused the use of the Ashram's garden and orchard and began to support a complimentary network of local farmers."



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- Transportation Impact and Renewable Energy at the Ashram

“Early in the program we also began to adjust the fleet of vehicles, reassessing needs and use patterns then shifting to more fuel-efficient models. This brought new awareness throughout the community leading to a 50% reduction in fuel consumption over the 5 year program”. Arlene goes on to say, “This is only a beginning. We intend to go further. This year we’ve purchased two Neighbourhood Electric Vehicles (NEVs) with the commitment that we will operate these vehicles on a “net zero” energy basis. The plan is to use photovoltaic’s panels but we are also assessing the potential of our small creek for mini-micro-hydro generation.”

The Ashram is taking steps to establish how it will meet its commitment to operate these vehicles on a 'net-zero energy gain' basis. Recently a stream flow weir was installed in Krishna Creek to assess how much power a mini-micro hydro generator could produce. And over the past year, data has also been gathered from a digital recorder and this is now being used to design a pilot project to establish what is possible for future use of photovoltaic panels and a small wind turbine.



Swami Sivananda and a Karma Yogi monitoring the stream flow weir installed in Krishna Creek to assess how much power a mini-micro hydro generator could produce.

Outcome of Carbon Neutral Program

The Ashram’s 5-year Carbon Neutral program has led to an 83% reduction in direct emissions.



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The new 7-year renewable energy program, maturing in 2020, will incrementally retire most of the balance. In the meantime, the outstanding emissions are being handled through the purchase of carbon offsets from Pacific Carbon Trust's portfolio of BC-based greenhouse gas reduction projects.

Endorsements

Dr. William Rees, professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia, an internationally acclaimed ecological economist and winner of a 2012 Blue Planet Prize, said of the Ashram achievement, "By striving for carbon neutrality, Yasodhara Ashram shows that communities can take significant steps to address global warming that are neither arduous nor a threat to their economies and lifestyles. Other communities should follow this example as if their lives depended on it – because ultimately they do!"

Michelle Mungall, MLA Nelson-Creston: "The work Yasodhara Ashram has done to become carbon neutral is commendable, and goes to show that these positive steps are possible in rural areas of BC."

"I am pleased to be able to congratulate the Yasodhara Ashram retreat and study centre for their achievement," said Alex Atamanenko, MP for BC Southern Interior. "Such environmental leadership, by example, reflects their great commitment to our planet's health - now and for future generations."

"The Ashram's achievement of carbon neutrality sets a great example of how steady commitment to a comprehensive plan can significantly reduce our impact on the environment," says Pacific Carbon Trust CEO Scott MacDonald. "By purchasing BC-based offsets from Pacific Carbon Trust, the Ashram is helping support the low-carbon economy – proving that environmental progress and a strong economy can go hand-in-hand."

Recognition

Yasodhara Ashram has been recognized by FortisBC's 2008 PowerSense Conservation Award, and by Tourism British Columbia with its prestigious Environmentally Responsible Tourism Award in 2009. Reader's Digest named the Ashram as Canada's best yoga retreat.

For further information:

Swami Sivananda
Paris Marshall Smith

250-227-9224 swamisiva@yasodhara.org
250-227-9224 paris@yasodhara.org