

A Labour Guide to Climate Action

A Job-rich Transition to Sustainability

We are all in this together. That truth has resonated across our world since the devastating impact of COVID 19. In response, governments made unprecedented decisions to protect the public, and took emergency measures not seen in our lifetime. Now we need to take equally bold steps to meet the looming threat of climate change.

The evidence of climate change – fires, floods, heat waves and droughts – is impossible to deny. The climate crisis is real, but also presents an opportunity. We can use our skills and knowledge to plan a truly sustainable, low-carbon economy with good jobs for all. Let's work together to ensure that the choices for our future are the right ones.



Decades ago Canadian unions started building a health and safety movement to challenge the appalling level of workplace accidents and deaths. We had to confront employers and politicians, educate our members, fight for regulations, and win workplace health and safety committees. Together with allies in health professions and fair employers, we succeeded in dramatically reducing fatalities and occupational disease. We can do the same for the climate.

► The Climate Emergency

Carbon emissions have created a “greenhouse effect” that is raising temperatures and causing extreme weather events. Canada has one of the highest per capita levels of emissions, so we have a special responsibility to help meet the United Nations goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. The human impact is greatest in the global south, in regions where many of our families came from.

By signing the 2015 Paris Agreement world leaders agreed that we need to take serious action to avert catastrophic outcomes. And young people across the world are demanding that we all take responsibility for the outcome.

► Responding to the Crisis

Taking action to address the climate crisis is everyone’s business. There is no doubt that changing our economy will take hard work, but there are clear examples of how to achieve results. The billions of public dollars mobilized in the face of COVID 19 set a new standard for public intervention in the economy and society. The climate crisis calls for nothing less.

► Climate Justice is Union Business

The labour movement has been a driving force for social progress for over a century. From healthcare to pensions and maternity leave – unions bargained benefits for their members and then worked with allies to win them as universal programs. Climate change is the biggest threat to our future, and many unions are stepping up to the challenge. Labour efforts first started with curbing workplace toxins

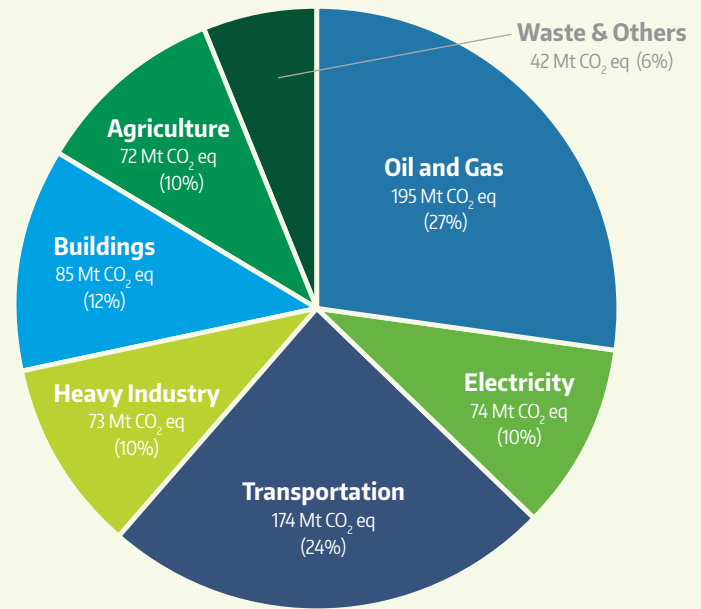


Just Transition is an approach to environmental policy-making that aims to minimize the impact of change on workers in affected industries and communities, and to involve workers in decisions about their livelihoods. The basic principle of just transition is that the costs of climate action should be shared across society and not just by those working in certain industries.

and pollution. Today it includes work in every sector – from retrofitting buildings, to reducing waste, to greening the curriculum in schools. Together we can create a collective path to a low-carbon future.

Canadian Emissions by Sector 2017 (latest data)

Total: 716 Mt CO₂ eq



► Climate Justice

Climate justice means ensuring that jobs in the new green economy are good stable jobs with benefits and a living wage. Compared to global supply chains based on cheap labour and extreme energy projects, there can be many more jobs created by upgrading our buildings, expanding transit and public services, reducing waste, changing consumer patterns and shifting to a circular economy.

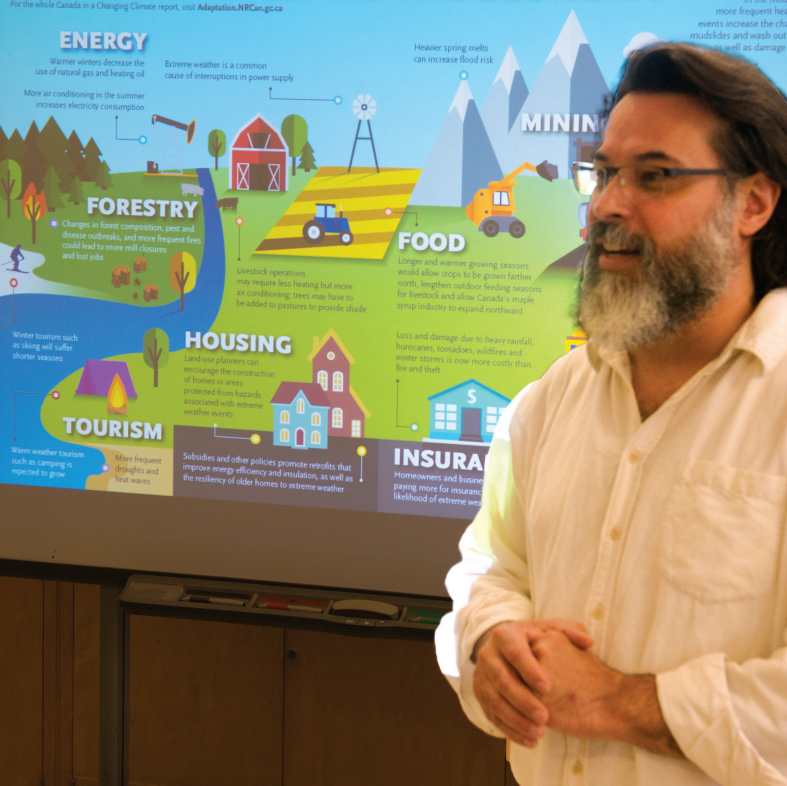
Everyone must be part of a new shared prosperity, including communities and people who didn’t always have access to good jobs in the past. We don’t want anyone left behind, which is why Just Transition is a crucial demand made by unions across the world.

We also recognize that Canada’s relationship to Indigenous peoples must start to address the legacy of injustice and discrimination that has been central to this country’s development.

► Workers Knowledge is Crucial

No matter what sector of the economy, front-line workers understand the system best. Whether in public

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECONOMY



At the international level, unions are approaching employers about climate-proofing the workplace. That includes secure supply chains; resilience during extreme weather events; and lowering direct carbon emissions. There are many employers striving to adopt best practices from around the world. Just like the decades-long effort building a culture of health and safety, unions can help drive meaningful change in our workplace operations.

service or private enterprise, our members create the goods and services that are central to our economy. That point was driven home during the COVID19 pandemic, with a new-found respect offered to many whose work had been deeply undervalued. Re-designing a workplace to lower carbon intensity requires the real, gritty knowledge of the people directly involved.

Workers have much to offer about how to lower carbon levels and reduce pollution. But respect and job security are essential ingredients to a partnership on climate action. Everyone has to benefit from greening the economy.

What Can Local Unions Do?

Local unions can undertake a step by step process to build a strong commitment to climate justice. That includes:

- training members to play a role on climate change
- setting up a joint committee to map and reduce emissions in the workplace
- asking employers to outline their plan to climate-proof their operations.

Start by securing a formal motion endorsed by both the local executive and the members. Information can be shared in newsletters and social media, included in steward and safety rep training, and members can be trained as advocates in the workplace or in coalition work.

Unions can also get involved in local efforts for climate justice. Cities have led the way in responding to climate change, so labour can partner with local elected officials to win effective public policies. Mobilizing members for public events and lobbying politicians are all part of how we influence decisions.

Contact the Labour Education Centre for help in navigating these steps.

Making Change in the Workplace

Unions can start by asking questions. Employer associations have developed climate plans for each sector, but often those aren't being applied in the workplace. Asking the employer to share that plan is the first step to identifying how to lower the carbon footprint of the day-to-day operations. Just as health and safety laws require employers to ensure competent supervision of the work process, every employer should develop the ability to lower carbon emissions.

The key elements of a plan address:

- building energy use
- energy use in production processes
- waste reduction
- supply chain
- transportation of people and goods

We don't have to become experts to ask the questions. Labour activists are trained to recognize the problem areas and the opportunities for improvement, although the outcomes will be very different from site to site. In larger workplaces, our goal should be to establish a formal emissions reduction committee that can oversee this work.



Working with Allies + Partners

Across Canada, unions have worked in coalitions on countless issues. Many of our partners in these efforts become long-time allies who appreciate labour's commitment to social and economic justice. Today young people are determined to see meaningful results instead of unfilled promises, and are climate organizing in every community.

Unions can reach out and identify solutions that also tackle economic inequality and systemic discrimination. Working effectively in our unions and communities is the way to make real progress on climate action – and on climate justice.

A Plan of Engagement

Here is a basic outline of how you can undertake this work in your union:

1 Win Agreement

- Recruit well-respected leaders and activists to sponsor this effort
- Ask the Executive to adopt a resolution to commit to climate action
- Take the resolution to a membership meeting for endorsement
- Announce the resolution on the website, social media and newsletter

2 Build Capacity

- Explore training opportunities for members to help green the workplace
- Recruit and train climate justice advocates for workplaces and public campaigns
- Establish your own Environment Committee at the local or regional level

3 Secure Action

- Meet with the employer to find how they plan to “climate-proof” the workplace
- Negotiate the establishment of a Workplace Emissions Reduction Committee (or expand the role of the Health and Safety Committee) to bring the expertise of your members to the table
- Engage members in reducing the carbon footprint of the entire work operation and supply chain
- Celebrate achievements and inspire others to take action!

For further information, contact workgreen@laboureducation.org



[Laboureducation.org](http://laboureducation.org)

LabourClimateJustice.ca