

## ENERGY CONSERVATION - A FAMILY AFFAIR

### ‘THE BILL OF RIGHTS’

BY CAMERON RING (14 YEARS OLD)

Fuel use means different things to different people, to my Mom and Dad it is mostly the bills, to my brothers and sister it means the use of a whole host of different gadgets and of course being kept warm and dry. To me it often means needless waste and I am interested in the impact that problem can have on our planet.

I saw an area where all of our positions on energy use converged, and I saw this catalyst purely by chance, however this convergence was often not made available or even seen by us kids, the bills! Mom and Dad would say that the bills were going up and basically just moan at all of us kids, truthfully with little effect. We never actually saw the bills, never saw how our usage was increasing, never felt part of the problem and therefore never felt part of any solution.

So I had this need to see the BChydro, Terasen Gas and UFA Gasoline bills and there was a lot of good information on them. I liked the daily average usage bar charts, although they were not all easy to understand (what's a kWh, GJ or joules?). What did become clear were the months that eclipsed the others, the winter months and the summer road trip - it became clear things we did had an impact.

The family got interested, for the first time we all could see our fuel use and how it was quite wasteful. A lot of the energy use was attributable directly to us kids. I had this idea, I thought what is really lacking is the inclusion of the children in the billing and usage process. It really seems obvious, kids lack of financial inclusion distance them from the overall impact of spending and energy usage.

I suggest a revamp of the billing process, either replace or attach a simpler more visual bill with a greater emphasis on comparison and usage saving ideas. BChydro has a small area already doing this, however I feel a greater focus on what is going up or being reduced would have a very real impact.

If the energy companies sent their bill out with a kids inclusive look, competitions, helpful information that helps include children, parents would welcome it as it would benefit them with reduced bills and children would feel genuinely empowered. A coloured sheet showing month to month a year apart (ie this year versus last) power usage by equipment type (washer, dryer, fridge, iron, kettle, etc) and power saving tips.

I've seen a demonstration at a show where a power saving bulb and an old fashioned bulb were lit by turning a hand crank, the power saving bulb was far easier to light, needed far less energy from me cranking the handle. This type of physical demonstration should be brought into schools and would underscore the real need to adopt power saving products.

I envisage the ideal outcome having all energy companies telling their customers that they intend to start sending out a new kid friendly billing sheet and explaining that this should benefit the adult/parent/guardian/grandparent/school if they support the scheme and fully involve their children. Clearly not all homes have children, but in all honesty many adults would welcome a clearer, easier to understand bill with energy saving tips on it.

The new kids info bill must be clear and easy to understand, have a set scheme to allow for familiarity to grow and have a reward basis to encourage adoption. The reward aspect might be in the form of a club, where the company rewards further innovation and tips from club members (texts, e-mails and achievements). The reward might come from some parents or schools who see a genuine reduction in their energy use (therefore cost to them). But a real reward would come from those kids who are able to see, perhaps like me, for the first time how they can help, with tangible feedback. Internally motivated kids want to help, we all know of global warming, all they need is a conduit to achieve it, and as they say knowledge is power!

If the idea of a paper based sheet is not wanted, then an internet based scheme will be the other choice (I think this would lower the impact that a paper system would achieve). The saving made on not using paper and the postage costs must be invested in gaining the online members, increasing the interactive nature of the site and offering blogs and competitions with, hopefully the schools would be an obvious choice.

I strongly believe that an idea such as I have outlined here would have a massive impact on the actions of our youth, this inclusion would assist all of us. Active kids would help not only now but in the future, as we become savvy consumers of tomorrow. Parents will need to see the reduction in cash terms, taking into consideration price increases, they'd need to be told your family have saved 'X' amount of dollars in comparison to last year, well done. This achievement could be shared with the children, even if the cash saved is not, the rewards could be as simple as helping out our parents, and having the results to show for it.

In summary, I believe the youth of today is not an untapped resource, they're pretty smart and often know more about climate than their parents, what they are is disenfranchised. Powerless to help, like everyone kids want to see a benefit from their action, where can I see the results? Include them, treat them like a customer too, help show them how they are helping and then you'll see a massive change from the old stale way in which the companies push out bills as merely a means to get paid to a tangible method of energy usage reduction for all.