

PENDER COMMUNITY TRANSITION (PCT)
*** a cooperative alliance for a brighter future ***

November, 2012

Where to begin? You want to conserve some energy, and maybe also be part of this “energy transition” to renewable, low-carbon sources, but how to start? Just in case it creates a few “sparks” for you, here are some stories from Pender’s second annual, November 17 Energy Action Day.

First, a story in a picture... an exquisite collage of tissue paper, tiny details, and love. This is what a young family brought to the Energy Action Day, to give a glimpse of their amazing little, off-grid house. They rely on a solar photovoltaic panel in a tree, solar water heating on the roof, a composting toilet, and more. To have a peek, you can google “Pender” and “Transition” and check our November 19 post.

An older Pender couple shared a similarly inspiring story, of coming here in 1999 and wanting to live low-energy and low-impact, but not having a clue how. So they found a Pender builder and an energy expert they could trust, and soon they had a small south-oriented cabin, with 1 solar photovoltaic panel and 2 deep cell batteries. This is enough to run some lights, radio, sound system, computer, coffee grinder, food cooler, etc. Instead of a well pump for water, they have rainwater catchment from their metal roof.

Off-grid is not for most of us, but these stories show the option of having some photovoltaic, e.g. for backup during power failures like the one happening as I write this! What follows are not recommendations about any particular options or persons, but rather just some informative places to start your own research.

J. Scott was one of the Energy Action Day speakers who focussed on solar energy, i.e. photovoltaic electric panels and also solar water heating (see www.illuminatesolar.ca). Photovoltaic panel prices have dropped by 2/3 in the past few years, so what didn’t make sense for your house before might be worth considering now. Further on small photovoltaics, an engineer Penderite recently had a good experience purchasing a tabletop battery charger, and a larger, handy folding PV unit (from www.eco-worthy.com).

Further on solar water heating, PCT just heard again from last year’s Energy Action Day speaker James Smyth (www.pacificsolarsmart.com), who’s spent a lot of time sharing information with us. Now Smyth is offering a new, lower-cost but high efficiency system, e.g. at \$2,000 for do-it-yourself people, or more for installation. Remember too, CRD Building Inspection should be called about any energy retrofit.

Everyone’s energy needs and abilities are so different. That’s why it can be useful to start with a home assessment by an Independent Energy Advisor, like Doug Green from this year’s Energy Action Day (see www.advancedhomeenergy.ca). An assessment costs \$175 plus travel, after the government rebate that’s supposed to be in effect until March, 2013. You can learn a lot about your energy-saving options, and also become eligible for other rebates until March, 2013. For lower-income families, BC Hydro offers a free kit of energy-saving devices, and also a free home assessment if your Hydro has been high.

This year’s final speaker was John McQuaid (www.waterwindsolar.com), who has broad experience with various renewable energy installations. In particular, he talked about the new ductless heat pump units that can be a super-efficient way to heat an area of your house. These have a “head” that looks like a baseboard heater installed inside, with pipes leading through the wall to a small heat exchange unit outside. McQuaid also has experience with both simple and complex rainwater catchment systems. One version to explore is using gravity to provide water even during power failures, when the pump is out.

Thanks so much to everyone who contributed to an inspiring Energy Action Day, including our funders – the CRD, Pender Local Trust Committees, and Vancity. Thanks also to the Pender family who let us end the day with a test-drive of a display - their fabulous Nissan Leaf electric car! (see www.nissan.ca/leaf).

You can go to www.pendercommunitytransition.ca for more about energy, and also food growing and economic relocalization – three key areas for community resilience. Next up for PCT: a Poultry Raising Skill-Building Workshop, on Saturday, January 19, 2012. Please call 629-3825 if you’re interested!

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