



Backgrounder on a Carbon Neutral 2010 Winter Games

SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

The 2010 Winter Games and the Environment

- Winter sports are threatened by climate change. According to scientists, there will be less snow and ice in the near future.¹ This will have profound implications for winter sports industries, and future Winter Olympic Games.
- The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) Bid Book states: "Our goal is to move towards a zero net emissions Games that is climate neutral."²
- At the United Nations in October 2007, VANOC CEO John Furlong stated: "...Climate Change is at the top of our environmental agenda having set an early goal of a carbon neutral Games."³
- "Carbon neutral" (or climate neutral) means having net zero greenhouse gas emissions, and is achieved by reducing emissions wherever possible, and then purchasing high quality carbon offsets to mitigate the emissions that remain.
- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has officially made "Environment" the third pillar of the Games, after "Sport", and "Culture".⁴
- VANOC's entire sustainability budget is roughly \$15,653,000. However, this includes not only "Environment" but also inner-city engagement and Aboriginal participation. By way of comparison, the Cultural Olympiad, billed by VANOC as an "exciting, innovative and accessible Olympic and Paralympic arts and cultural program and festivals", is expected to cost around \$30,000,000.⁵

The Climate Impact of the 2010 Winter Games

- In 2007, VANOC asked the David Suzuki Foundation to produce an estimate of the 2010 Games' greenhouse gas emissions. The estimate came in at roughly 328,000 tonnes – the equivalent of approximately 65,600 cars on the road for one year. The report, called *Meeting the Challenge*, also showed how VANOC could make the Games carbon neutral.⁶
- The biggest part of VANOC's carbon footprint (69%) is estimated to be from air travel by participants, officials, sponsors, employees, media and spectators. Other major contributors to the carbon footprint include energy use (9%) and local transportation during the Games (10%).
- VANOC has reduced its carbon footprint through initiatives such as making its venues more energy efficient. But as the Games approach there are some missing pieces in VANOC's climate action plans. For example, VANOC has not yet said how they will address unavoidable emissions from energy use at venues, local transportation, and air travel to Vancouver by Olympic participants and spectators.

Play It Cool: Athletes Working Together to Stop Climate Change

- Many of the athletes who signed the open letter to CEO John Furlong are members of *Play It Cool* (www.playitcool.ca), an initiative by athletes to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change on sports. These athletes have voluntarily taken responsibility for their own climate impact by offsetting their emissions from travel to competitions and training, using the highest quality offsets in the world (those that meet The Gold Standard).

- Athletes signing the open letter to John Furlong are calling on VANOC to:
 - Take responsibility for the full carbon footprint of the Games, as identified in *Meeting the Challenge*. This includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions where possible and purchasing high quality carbon offsets for remaining emissions, including at least 20 per cent Gold Standard carbon offsets.
 - Carry out an effective public outreach campaign to inspire Canadians to take action to address climate change during the Olympics and in their daily lives.
- Large sporting events around the world, including World Cup Soccer⁷ and the Super Bowl, have already gone carbon neutral. So have over 500 National Hockey League players. Many other large events and conferences are also taking responsibility for their climate impact. Prominent companies including Nike, Google, Dell, News Corporation, HSBC, Vancity, and Ben & Jerry's are going carbon neutral.

Meeting the Challenge: A Carbon Neutral Olympics

- Based on estimates in *Meeting the Challenge*, it would cost less than \$5 million to make the Games carbon neutral (assuming \$15/tonne for offsets). This sum represents 0.3% of VANOC's current operating budget of about \$1.76 billion.
- *Meeting the Challenge* outlined a number of innovative ways that VANOC can offset the Games' climate impact without relying on public funds. One option would be for VANOC to partner with a corporate offset sponsor, as it has done in a number of other product categories.
- Greenhouse gas management saves money. Olympic venues that have been built to be energy efficient will save money in energy costs over their operational lifetime.
- Investing in high quality carbon offsets not only benefits the climate by reducing greenhouse gases, but can also help communities transition to clean energy, and provide jobs.
- Offsets that meet The Gold Standard are widely recognized to be the highest quality offsets in the world, and have undergone strict third-party verification to ensure that they provide real reductions in greenhouse gases.
- To give all Canadians an opportunity to join the athletes in supporting climate action by the 2010 Winter Olympics, the David Suzuki Foundation has created an online letter to CEO John Furlong that the public can sign on to. It can be signed at: www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/Projects/Olympics

Sources:

1. UNEP (2007) *Global Outlook for Ice & Snow*
2. <http://www.vancouver2010.com/dl/00/50/33/-/50330/prop=data/ihszfm/50330.pdf>
3. <http://www.vancouver2010.com/en/about-vanoc/organizing-committee/public-communications/speeches/october-2007-un-environment-program/-/33468/33464/1kzfupr/un-environment-program-unep-mo.html>
4. http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/environment/index_uk.asp
5. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090202.wOlympiad02/BNStory/Entertainment/?page=rss&id=RTGAM.20090202.wOlympiad02>
6. http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Publications/Meeting_the_challenge.asp
7. <http://www.oeko.de/oekodoc/292/2006-011-en.pdf>

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