



INTERNATIONAL WALK TO SCHOOL MONTH OCTOBER 2009

Backgrounder

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Schools across Ontario will join with children and families from 40 countries who are participating in International Walk to School Month (IWALK). IWALK is an annual mass celebration of active transportation involving children and youth and its aims are to increase daily physical activity, improve safety, reduce traffic congestion, and decrease air pollution, while developing community cohesion and social interaction.

The International Walk to School movement began in 2000, following several successful individual walk to school promotional days and weeks that had been held in a number of countries, including UK, Canada and USA in the late 1990's. The **International Walk To School Steering Group** (IWALK), which comprises representatives from both national and local government and non-government agencies around the world, was formed in 1999 with the objective of working together in a global partnership to share best practice and to support, publicise and promote walk to school initiatives and events being held anywhere in the world, all year round. Visit www.iwalktoschool.org for further details on the international walk to school movement.

Our transportation choices have global implications. When families choose 'active transportation' to get to school and other local destinations they are supporting healthy sustainable living and they save money in fuel costs too!

HEALTHIER, MORE ACTIVE CHILDREN

- Canadian children's fitness grade is a 'D' for the third consecutive year, according to a recent report card prepared by Active Healthy Kids Canada. According to this report, children report spending twice as much time in front of a screen as they do engaged in physical activity. (Active Healthy Kids Canada, http://www.activehealthykids.ca/programs_2007reportcard.cfm)
- Only 10% of Canadian youth are active enough to receive any heart-health benefits (Vail, S., (2001) *The Physical Inactivity Epidemic: The Preventative Role of Active School Communities, Discussion Paper Prepared for Delegates of the National Roundtable on Active School Communities, October, p. 6*);
- The Ontario 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report, *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*, highlighted the need to provide safe walking and cycling routes and designing neighbourhoods with shop and schools within walking distance. (2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives Pages 4/5*.)
- www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/ministry_reports/cmoh04_report/healthy_weights_1124_04.pdf);

International Walk to School Month:

- Promotes and encourages families to use 'active travel' to get to and from school as often as possible.
- Students who are unable to use active travel to school can participate in organized in-school activities during recess or lunch breaks, like a kilometer club.
- Children who walk to school may be emotionally healthier than children who travel by motorized vehicles. (*Transport related health impacts—Costs and benefits, with a particular focus on children: Synthesis report (first draft)*. Herry Consult (Vienna, Austria) for UNECE-WHO Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE-PEP), Feb. 2004 http://herry.at/the-pep/down/malta/Input-Paper_Malta_Synthesis-First-Draft.pdf. Accessed November 22, 2004. *Of 244 young people aged 9-16 years, those who always walked showed lower scores concerning depression, aggression/hostility, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms compared with children who never or seldom walked. But, were the children healthy because they walked, or did they walk because they were healthy?*)
- The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, <http://www.cflri.ca>, has released a series of bulletins 'Making the Case for Active Transportation'. These are really helpful for schools, school boards and municipal partners when discussing active school travel.

REDUCED AIR POLLUTION AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS EQUALS HEALTHIER KIDS

- Asthma is one of the most prevalent respiratory diseases in children. With incidents doubling in the past decade, it is the number one cause of school absenteeism in Canada. (*The Air Children Breathe: The Effects on Their Health, Pollution Probe*);
- Canada has one of the highest asthma rates in the world. Asthma affects about two million Canadians and a growing number of sufferers are children. Asthma is now the most common chronic disease in children, and the leading cause of hospital admissions. (Fulton, J. (2002) *Breathing easier, Alternatives Journal, 28(1), pp. 36-37.*) (York Centre for Applied Sustainability and Pollution Probe (1996) "Clearing the Air" Transportation, Air Quality and Human Health Conference. Toronto);
- Health Canada estimates that air pollution kills almost 6000 Canadians every year. (David Suzuki Foundation *Climate Change Fast Facts – Climate Change Impacts -*, http://www.davidsuzuki.org/files/climate/cop/Climate_impacts.pdf)
- Scientists estimate that globally, one million species (a quarter of the world's land-based animals and plants) will be at risk of extinction by 2050 in response to shifting habitats due to climate change. (David Suzuki Foundation *Climate Change Fast Facts – Climate Change Impacts -*, http://www.davidsuzuki.org/files/climate/cop/Climate_impacts.pdf)
- Nineteen of the hottest 20 years on record have occurred since 1980. (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2005 *Tied 1998 As World's Hottest Year*, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science/recordtemp2005.html)
- With the number of cars on the road expected to double, gains in fuel efficiency alone will not reduce CO2 pollution. Measures that reduce vehicle miles traveled also improve the quality of life and

protect natural resources. (Union of Concerned Scientists, *Cars and Trucks and Global Warming*, http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_vehicles/vehicles_health/cars-and-trucks-and-global-warming.html)

International Walk to School Month:

- Teaches students the impacts that transportation choices have on our environment through curriculum-linked resources and activities.
- Reduces local air pollution emissions by encouraging active travel to school.
- Results in fewer vehicles in the school zone at drop-off and pick-up times thereby lessening the 'bubble of pollution' that envelopes many schools.
- Has a significant impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In one year, nine families walking daily to school prevent approximately 1,000 kg of greenhouse gas emissions being released into the atmosphere. (*Pembina Institute:*) The Green Communities | Active & Safe Routes to School program's IWALK Month 2006 prevented 114 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from being released into the atmosphere.

SAFER STREETS FOR CHILDREN

- 1 in 15 children can expect to be injured in a road collision before they are 16. Traffic fatalities are the leading cause of death in Canada for children over the age of one year (*Canadian Institute for Child Health, 1999*)
- Heavy traffic reduces the independent mobility of children and youth. (*Tranter, P., Doyle, J. (1996), Reclaiming the residential street as play space, International Play Journal, 4, pp. 81-97*);
- Cars present a far more lethal threat to our children than all the perpetrators of aggression put together. For every one victim of violence, three children are killed on the road. In the OECD countries, 41% of deaths of children under the age of 14 are caused by road traffic accidents.
- (*European Commission Directorate-General for the Environment (2002) kids on the move, p. 25*);
- An investigation in the UK found that opportunities and locations for spontaneous, non-structured play can be severely restricted by traffic. (*Hillman M, Adams J, Whitelegg J, One false move: A study of children's independent mobility. London, UK: Policy Studies Institute, 1990, http://www.psi.org.uk/publications/ENVIRON/onefm.htm*).

International Walk to School Month:

- More families walking to school puts important adult 'eyes on the street' and repopulates our streets with people rather than vehicles.
- Cars socially dislocate. The private retreat of the car means that people often don't develop neighbourly reliance and support networks. Walking to school in groups helps to re-establish these support networks.
- Provides opportunities to teach children life long street safety skills. By walking with a parent or caregiver children learn how to cross streets, select safe routes and recognize the importance of walking in groups.
- Through curriculum linked activities students learn street smart skills and identify traffic signs.
- Life attracts life. Where there are pedestrians on the street ("eyes on the street"), there are automatic safety networks, especially for children. There is a need to reduce the domination by cars in our communities and combat the erosion of sidewalk play space by cars. (*Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities*)

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Some of the references used in this media backgrounder were copied from the Centre for Sustainable Transportation's Child-and Youth-Friendly Land-Use and Transport Planning Guidelines, prepared by Richard Gilbert and Catherine O'Brien, March 28, 2005. Refer to for this and other related documents.

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