

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 2015 October 8

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**FILE:** 33000 01  
*Reference: Environmental Factors*

**SUBJECT:** CLIMATE CHANGE WARNING LABELS ON GAS PUMP NOZZLES

**PURPOSE:** To respond to Council's request for a report on the issue of climate change warning labels on gas pump nozzles, based on the delegation from the non-profit group Our Horizon.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council consider future opportunities for public communication about climate change in the context of the regional and municipal sustainability policy framework, including Burnaby's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Community Energy and Emissions Plan.
2. **THAT** copies of this report be provided to John Nguyen representing Our Horizon, to the Metro Vancouver Climate Action Committee and to Metro Vancouver member municipalities.

#### REPORT

At the Regular meeting of Council on 2015 July 6, a delegation from the non-profit organization Our Horizon requested that Burnaby support affixing warning labels about climate change to gas pump nozzles. Arising from the discussion, Council requested that staff report on this matter. This report responds to that request.

#### 1.0 BACKGROUND

Our Horizon is a national non-profit organization campaigning to raise awareness about the need for action on climate change through public education that uses warning labels on vehicle fuel ("gas") pump nozzles. The proposed warning messages are based on the model of cigarette health warnings which the proponents state have been effective in changing people's behaviour. Our Horizon has drafted example label designs which depict images, such as a caribou cow and calf, along with text, such as "Warning – use of this fuel contributes to climate change which may put up to 30% of species at a likely risk of extinction." The labels aim to connect these climate change effects to the specific personal action of filling a vehicle tank with gasoline in order to encourage people to take action. The representatives requested that Burnaby support the campaign and endorse a resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM).

## 1.1 Support to Date for Gas Pump Warning Labels

As of the end of August 2015, warning labels on gas pump nozzles have been supported by local government actions as outlined below:

- In January 2015, the City of West Vancouver supported drafting a resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to require all gas stations in Canada to display warning labels on pump nozzles. Subsequently, the City of Colwood advanced a slightly different draft resolution entitled “Warning Labels for all Fossil Based Liquid Fuels” (see *Appendix 1, attached*).
- Between January and July 2015, the City of Moncton NB, City of Guelph ON, District of Saanich BC, Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities, City of Waterloo ON, and City of Oakville ON, voted to support the UBCM resolution.
- In June 2015, the City of North Vancouver voted to bring forward a bylaw requiring all public gas stations in the City to install climate change warning labels. This would apply to all six stations currently operating, as well as any future additional stations. At this time, North Vancouver has given first reading to a Business Licence Bylaw amendment and is proceeding with Public Hearing.

## 1.2 UBCM Resolution

The District of West Vancouver passed a resolution, (see *Appendix 1, attached*) requesting that all retail petroleum vendors in Canada be required to affix warning labels onto gas pump nozzles, on the basis that: a) combustion of vehicle fuel contributes to climate change, and b) that health labels are required on tobacco products.

The resolution forwarded to the UBCM at their September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Convention was sponsored by the City of Colwood, and was entitled “Warning Labels for All Fossil Based Fuels,” (see *Appendix 1, attached*). This resolution also noted the contribution of vehicle fuels to climate change, and added the concern of sea level rise impacts on coastal communities, but did not include the reference to tobacco labeling.

The resolution (No. B112) was endorsed with a minor amendment to read:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that UBCM support, and that member local governments will implement where possible, legislation to require retailers of petroleum products to provide plastic sleeves (nozzle toppers) with warning labels on pump handles for all fossil based liquid fuels.

## **2.0 DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 Jurisdiction**

At this time, the authority of local or national governments to legislate gas pump warning labels has yet to be tested in court. Our Horizon partnered with the University of Victoria Law Society on a legal backgrounder on this issue. The backgrounder outlines a rationale in support of the issue being within local government jurisdiction, for example as the basis to enact a bylaw, but also states that legal challenge by petroleum businesses is likely and advises that local governments seek their own legal opinion. Due to the potential for a legal challenge to the City and the associated costs of a potential challenge, as well as for other reasons discussed below, it is not recommended that the City pursue a bylaw on this matter at this time.

### **2.2 Business Perspective**

Consultation with fuel vendors is not reported to have been undertaken in jurisdictions where support or action is proposed for warning labels. Business associations representing vehicle fuel vendors in other jurisdictions have voiced opposition to legislation requiring gas pump warning labels<sup>1</sup> on the basis that it unfairly portrays the industry in a negative light, has associated costs and may reduce sales and/or compete with advertising revenue if they already use nozzle signage for product promotion.

### **2.3 Communicating About Climate Change**

Climate change has been called a “wicked” problem: it is complex, with diffuse impacts that occur at a range of scales from local to global; it is difficult to clearly define (different stakeholders have different views of the nature of the problem and appropriate responses); and it crosses governance boundaries<sup>2</sup>. Solutions to climate change are not simple. This means, among other implications, that it can seem overwhelming and distant to an individual person’s everyday decisions. Making the connection between a person’s actions – in this case, the action of filling up a vehicle fuel tank – and climate change impacts could help to personalize the issue so that some people feel more compelled to change their behaviour. However, this approach should be carefully considered for various reasons including those listed below<sup>3</sup>.

- Gas pump labels would not distinguish between consumers with different patterns of vehicle fuel consumption, motivations, or reasons for driving. Negative messaging that relies on fear and guilt may cause some people to feel angry and distance themselves from consideration of the issue, or may generate other unintended reactions.

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<sup>1</sup> Huffington Post (online): “Gas Retailers Line Up Against Climate-Change Warning Labels On Pumps” 2015-05-26, accessed August 2015: [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/05/26/climate-change-warnings-gas-pumps\\_n\\_7441534.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/05/26/climate-change-warnings-gas-pumps_n_7441534.html)

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Chris Reidy, “Climate Change is a Super Wicked Problem”, accessed August 2014: <http://chrisriedy.me/2013/05/29/climate-change-is-a-super-wicked-problem/>

<sup>3</sup> These points draw on literature sources including: Marshall, G. *Don’t Even Think About It – Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. Bloomsbury USA, New York. 2014.

- Research has shown that many people continue to ignore or ‘disbelieve’ in climate change and its impacts, not due to an absence of information, but rather for societal, culturally influenced and other reasons. Presenting information in the absence of a frame that addresses these complex issues may not support further consideration of this significant issue.
- Climate change has vast social justice, international security, economic and ecological impacts. Framing climate change as an “environmental” issue, for example using imagery of polar bears, caribou and other “charismatic megafauna” as typically employed by environmentalist groups (including Our Horizon), may not resonate well with those who do not identify with this imagery.
- Portraying climate change as something occurring in distant places, for example drought-stricken farmers in an African country (as shown in one of the Our Horizon labels) can frame the issue as having little relevance to people here, further ‘distancing’ the issue from a local context, and as such may detract from the intent of the ads.

Although the example label designs proposed by Our Horizon could be tailored to convey the message using different images than those described above, determining the best approach requires further consideration.

Finally, Our Horizon equates climate change warning labels with cigarette health labels. However, cigarette smoking is a different kind of issue: it is a relatively simple problem where the cause (smoking) is closely and directly tied with a very personal negative effect (disease), and the solution (quitting smoking) is obvious and can be immediately acted upon by a person, with immediate benefits. Climate change is a complex problem with diffuse impacts that requires society working together in creative ways that break down cultural and societal barriers. As such, the approach used for cigarette labels may not serve as an appropriate model for communicating about climate change.

In light of these factors, messaging and communication about climate change needs to be undertaken carefully and strategically.

## **2.4 Considerations for Climate Change Messaging Approaches**

Climate change can be communicated in many different ways. Our Horizon is promoting gas pump labels as a low-cost, opportunistic approach, to support broader dialogue on the issue. Regardless of the medium for communication, factors to consider that may address some of the concerns outlined above include the following.

- The type of messaging approach should be carefully considered and framed, and based upon evidence for its effectiveness, in order to overcome social and cultural barriers specific to the issue of climate change. Research could be undertaken to better address these concerns, for example using stakeholder focus groups and other accepted methodologies.

- Approaches could draw upon other successful public information campaigns undertaken in the region involving complex social and behavioural issues, such as recycling, food scraps, composting and drinking water conservation.
- Approaches may need to be adaptable and tailored to the local context, in order to communicate views on climate change that best support municipal and regional greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction objectives, and to appeal to the particular values held by people in different cities and towns, in order to span a diversity of views and opinions.
- Positive messaging approaches could be considered and provide information about specific things people can do to reduce GHG emissions. This could include encouraging walking or cycling more, facts about the benefits of using transit and fuel-efficient vehicles, and promoting programs and incentives such as for electric vehicles and car-sharing.

These considerations are just some examples of the context within which effective public communication on this complex issue could be undertaken.

## **2.5 Relationship to Burnaby's Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) and Environmental Sustainability Strategy (ESS)**

Burnaby is developing a Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) which will outline a target for reducing community GHG emissions, with supporting goals, strategies and actions. A high level summary of the proposed approach for the CEEP, including targets, goals and strategies, is anticipated to form part of the public consultation for Burnaby's Environmental Sustainability Strategy (ESS) in 2016, pending Council approval of Phase 3 – *Draft ESS*. A draft CEEP would then be shared publicly, prior to seeking Council approval of the final CEEP in 2016.

Burnaby's ESS addresses climate change and GHG emissions reduction through several of the ten broad themes and related goals:

- **Breathe** (Climate and Air Quality) – *A community resilient to climate change, with clean air and low carbon emissions.*
- **Live** (Land Use Planning and Development) – *A network of compact and complete communities, within a fabric of healthy ecosystems.*
- **Move** (Transportation) – *A walkable, bikeable, and transit-supported city that supports a healthy community and environment.*
- **Build** (Buildings and Energy) – *Buildings and infrastructure that have a positive impact on the environment.*

The ESS framework of goals, strategies and actions has been developed based upon extensive public and stakeholder engagement, and a Draft ESS is currently being prepared for a final phase of public consultation.

To: Environment Committee  
From: Director Planning and Building  
Re: Climate Change Warning Labels on Gas Pump Nozzles  
2015 October 8..... Page 6

Once adopted by Council, implementation of both the ESS and CEEP presents an opportunity to highlight opportunities for action on the part of the City, other levels of government, and individuals. This will provide a further context for communicating about climate change in a way that addresses the City's broad goals for sustainability. Specific approaches for communicating and engaging people on this issue, which could include communication approaches as described in Section 2.4., can be considered as part of future ESS and CEEP implementation.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Climate change is a critical and complex problem with social, economic and environmental impacts occurring at many different scales. Therefore, strategies for communication about this issue need to be carefully considered to ensure they engage the community and serve the directions set by the City.

The specific approach proposed by Our Horizon presents some concerns as outlined in this report. Nevertheless, gas pump nozzle signage in general, as a medium for communicating about climate change, presents an option for future consideration.

Therefore, it is recommended that Council consider future opportunities for public communication about climate change in the context of the regional and municipal sustainability policy framework, including Burnaby's ESS and CEEP.

  
Lou Pelletier, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

LT/sla/sa  
**Attachment**

cc: City Manager  
Director Engineering  
Director Finance  
City Clerk

**WEST VANCOUVER RESOLUTION AND COLWOOD-SPONSORED UBCM  
RESOLUTION**

**1. West Vancouver Resolution:**

**RECOMMENDED THAT:**

Council support the following resolution be advanced for consideration at the September 21/25, 2015 Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) conference and the June 5/8, 2015 Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) convention:

Whereas there is evidence that combustion of petroleum products such as gas and diesel in vehicle engines contributes to greenhouse gas emissions that affect natural systems in ways that are injurious to human health and the environment, and

Whereas point-of-sale warning labels have been required for other consumables, such as tobacco products, which has effectively curbed use of harmful products,

Therefore be it resolved that all vendors of retail petroleum products in Canada be legislated to provide warning labels on all pump handles (pump talkers), and that those companies who do not have this feature on their pump handle be obligated to fit them with the plastic sleeves which will allow warning labels to be displayed.

**2. City of Colwood Resolution to UBCM**

**B112 WARNING LABELS FOR ALL FOSSIL BASED LIQUID FUELS Colwood**

WHEREAS there is evidence that combustion of petroleum products such as gas and diesel used in vehicles contribute to greenhouse gas emissions that affect natural systems in ways that are injurious to human health and to the natural environment upon which we all depend for food and life;

AND WHEREAS sea level rise resulting from greenhouse gas emissions will cause significant harm to coastal communities:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that UBCM support, and will implement where possible, legislation to require retailers of petroleum products to provide plastic sleeves (nozzle toppers) with warning labels on pump handles for all fossil based liquid fuels.

Amended version of Resolution No. B112 (endorsed): THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that UBCM support, and *that member local governments* will implement where possible, legislation to require retailers of petroleum products to provide plastic sleeves (nozzle toppers) with warning labels on pump handles for all fossil based liquid fuels.