



The Agency for Co-operative Housing
L'Agence des coopératives d'habitation

Sustainability Survey

Summary Report



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Executive Summary

Sustainability ranks among the governing values of the Agency for Co-operative Housing (the Agency). We are dedicated to promoting sustainable practices both within the organization and among our client co-ops. We recognize our potential to influence housing co-operatives through our example and by guiding them toward more sustainable practices in their operations and with their members.

As part of this ongoing work, in November 2017, the Agency surveyed its co-op clients on their practice of sustainability to learn more about how the Agency can support these efforts. Approximately 445 Agency clients were invited to complete the online survey and were given two weeks to respond. Fifty-four per cent of co-ops who answered our call were in Ontario, followed by 34 per cent in B.C. and the remaining 12 per cent in Alberta and PEI. A total of 153 housing co-operatives (29%) completed our survey. The first 20 responders were entered into a draw for a \$100 Home Depot gift card.

The following report looks at the survey findings and provides recommendations for further work to be done, in collaboration with our sector partners.

For more information, or if you have any questions or comments on the report, please contact Natascha Morrison, Information Officer, at 613-234-4557 ext. 620 or by e-mail at nmorrison@agency.coop.

*We look to the future,
honouring the
environment,
strengthening our
operations and helping
our clients conserve their
properties for
generations to come.*



Sustainability Policy

One way the Agency promotes sustainability among its clients is through encouraging housing co-operatives to adopt a sustainability policy. In view of this, an objective of the survey was to find out how many housing co-operatives already have such a policy in place. While only 13 out of the 153 surveyed have made this commitment, when asked if they would consider adopting such a policy, 45 per cent of co-ops said yes, 53 per cent were not sure and 1 per cent replied no.



FUN FACT

All 13 co-ops with a sustainability policy use the CHF Canada Model Environmental Sustainability Policy. Interested in checking it out? You can find it on the Agency's website [HERE](#).



RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Ask CHF Canada to update its model policy document to be a fillable PDF.*
- *Continue promoting the policy on line and at Agency events.*

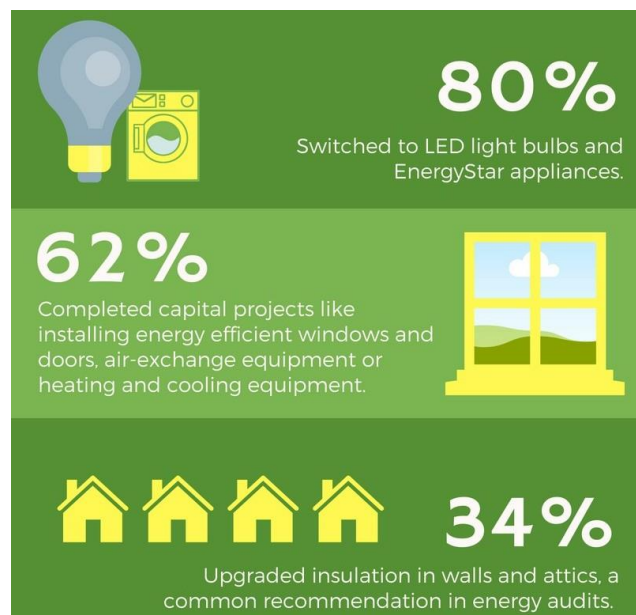
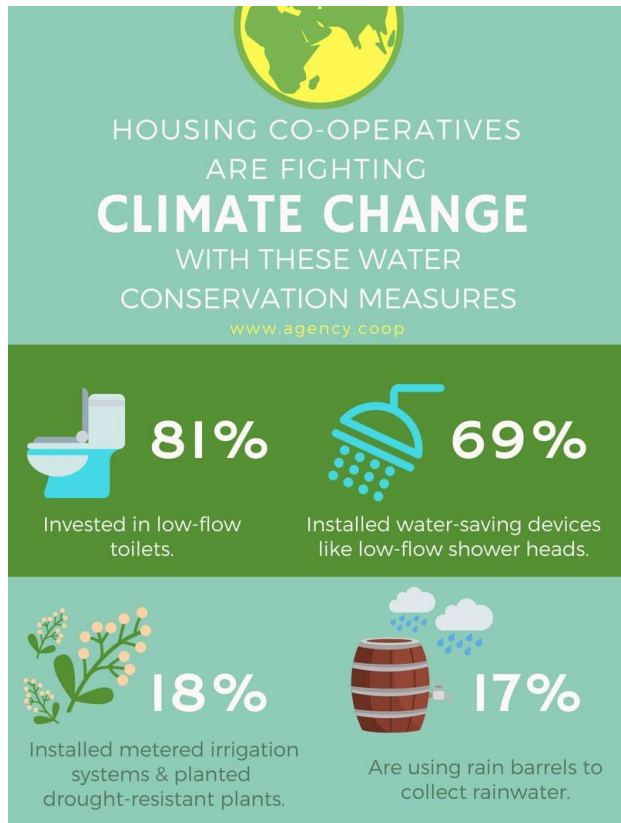


Water and Energy Conservation

Even without a sustainability policy in place, housing co-operatives have been quite active in implementing water- and energy-saving measures. Eighty-one per cent of respondents have installed low-flow toilets and 69 per cent have installed such water-saving devices as low-flow shower heads. Seventeen per cent have installed rain barrels and another 18 per cent have undertaken many different measures ranging from instant hot water tanks or metered irrigation systems to drought-resistant plants. One co-op has been able to cut back on the watering required for the grounds, as well as limiting car washing.

Over 80 per cent of housing co-ops have installed power-saving light bulbs and EnergyStar appliances. Sixty-two per cent of

co-ops have completed larger capital projects like installing more effective heating and cooling equipment, energy-efficient windows and doors or air-exchange equipment, and 34 per cent of those surveyed had upgraded insulation in walls and attics.



Approximately a dozen other housing co-ops had improved their properties with

- programmable thermostats
- insulated siding
- timers for external lights
- solar panels
- higher-efficiency baseboard heaters
- thermostats

In common areas, 60 per cent of housing co-ops have installed sensor-controlled lights and a few others LED lights. (LEDs are extremely energy efficient, consuming up to 90 per cent less power than incandescent bulbs.) Additionally, money and energy are saved in maintenance and replacement costs as a result of the LEDs' long lifespan. Many housing co-operatives (60%) are maintaining a moderate temperature indoors, while a dozen co-ops have installed blinds that repel solar heat in summer and retain it in winter.

60%
Installed sensor-controlled lights and LED lights in common areas. LEDs consume up to 90% less power than incandescent bulbs.

CLEAN ENERGY
Co-ops installed programmable thermostats, insulated siding, timers for external lights, solar panels, higher efficiency baseboard heaters, and thermostats..

START SMALL
The little things make a difference - maintain a moderate temperature in your home and office.

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Also on the wish list are training members to report dripping taps promptly, educating members on water-conservation measures, encouraging members to turn down the heat in winter and to use a fan in summer, instead of an air conditioner. A few co-ops said that they plan to install rain barrels or motion-sensing lights, or to replace older furnaces with high-efficiency models.

Saving Energy

Some co-ops told the Agency that they do not plan for further reductions in water and energy consumption. When asked what was preventing them from doing so, 27 per cent told us that they had done all they can do, while another 26 per cent of co-ops reported that they cannot afford additional measures. Forty-seven per cent of co-ops have never explored reducing their consumption of water and energy because the topic has not come up, is not a priority, or because members pay for their own water and utilities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Produce tip sheets or one-pagers and information videos on best practices. **Sixty per cent of co-ops surveyed asked for more resources!***
- *Ensure all resources are produced in plain language and presented from a co-op's perspective.*

What else did we learn?

Suppliers or Contractors

When choosing suppliers or contractors, 39 per cent of co-ops ask about their environmental practices and another 28 per cent favour fair-trade and fair-wage companies. Another 11 per cent put information about their environmental-sustainability requirements in their tender package. Some co-ops use contractors approved by their federation and others support small businesses by choosing local companies.



FUN FACT

- *The Agency has recently developed a plain-language [Guide to Project Management](#) with a helpful appendix on “Green, Sustainable and Energy-Efficient Construction”.*



RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Promote information to co-ops on green, sustainable and energy-efficient construction.*

Building Condition Assessments and Energy Audits

Eighty-two per cent of co-ops have commissioned a building condition assessment (BCA) with one-third saying that the BCA included recommendations for water and energy conservation. Thirty-three per cent have commissioned energy audits, with more than half reporting that they have adopted the recommendations outlined in the report. The 67 per cent that have not done so cite lack of funds, other priorities or lack of knowledge as reasons why. A few co-ops said that they plan to conduct an energy audit in the near future.



FUN FACT

- *The Agency has recently developed a plain-language [Guide to Building Condition Assessments and Reserve Fund Studies](#). [Check it out!](#)*



RECOMMENDATIONS

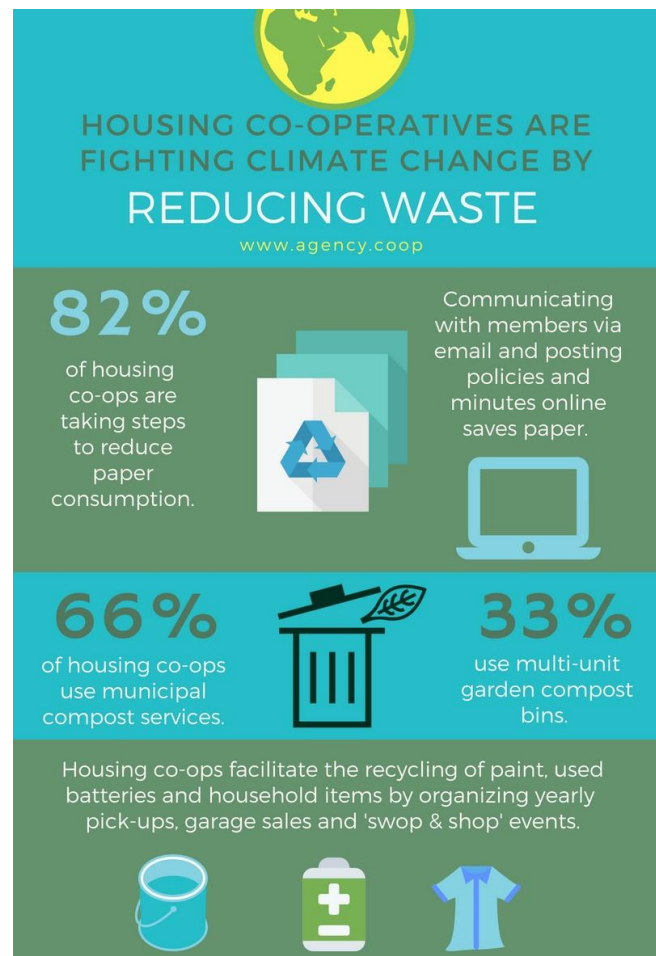
- Ask engineering firms that prepare BCAs to include details on the importance of finding a balance between cost savings and sustainability, otherwise known as life-cycle costing.
- Develop a plain-language guide to understanding energy audits.
- Explore new ways to encourage co-ops to adopt and follow through on the recommendations in their energy audits.

Paper Consumption

A large contingent of co-ops (82%) are taking steps to reduce paper consumption. The majority are recycling paper, copying and printing on both sides, reusing scrap paper, communicating with members by e-mail and postings on the co-op's website or Facebook page, and buying paper products made from recycled material. Other co-ops are using a "reading tick-list" for staff to read documents, rather than printing a copy for each person. One co-op is using iPads at board meetings, and another is doing away with board binders by posting policies, minutes, etc. on a password-protected section of the website.

Compost

One hundred of the co-ops (65%) surveyed said that their members compost food waste. Two-thirds use a municipal composting service, while one-third use multi-unit composting bins. A handful of co-ops use a private composting service paid for by the co-op and about a dozen have compost bins placed in their gardens. Deterrents to composting are such factors as municipalities not offering a composting service, being afraid of attracting animals (especially rats), lack of space and lack of interest.



Recycling

When asked whether co-ops help their members recycle any items, 50 per cent responded that they help with recycling paint, and 46 per cent facilitate battery recycling. Some co-ops organize a yearly pick-up for recyclables, and others have a community garage sale, or “swap and shop” events, in a common area of the co-op.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Develop tip sheets with targeted information about different municipal composting and recycling options for multi-residential units.*

Environmentally Friendly Products or Supplies

Almost half of co-ops surveyed use environmentally friendly cleaning products and 43 per cent use low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint, while another 24 per cent purchase environmentally friendly flooring. Only one co-op uses compostable cutlery and dishes for events. Another co-op uses lawn fertilizer that is environmentally safe.

What more can we do?

The majority of co-ops surveyed asked for more resources, with suggestions for tip sheets and how-to guides topping the list. Forty-four per cent of co-ops also felt that workshops and posters would help, and, of course, more financial assistance and funding information.



FUN FACT

- *Did you know we have a page devoted to sustainability-related grants and loans on our website? [Take a look!](#)*



RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Continue actively promoting the [Greener Co-op Microgrant Program](#) and sharing information on other sustainability programs, rebates and incentives.*

Want to know more?

The Agency has many more resources available on our [website](#), including our [Top 5 Energy-Saving Tips](#), [CHF Canada's Sustainability Tool Kit](#), and [CMHC's Renovator's Green Guide](#). As new resources are produced, including those recommended above, we will be sharing them on line, so be sure to check back often to see what's new.

You can also visit our [HomeRun website](#) to learn about how other co-ops are implementing energy-conservation measures that help them save money and reduce their co-op's environmental footprint.

Appendix A: Example Survey and Questions

Housing co-operatives all over the world are taking steps to shrink their carbon footprint by cutting back on their use of resources. Worldwide, many co-operatives have already committed themselves to the [Co-ops for 2030](#) campaign in support of the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs).

The Agency for Co-operative Housing is conducting a short survey to learn more about what our co-op clients are doing to reduce their carbon footprint. This information will help us find ways to support you in this work. Please submit one survey per co-op.

It should take about 10 minutes to complete our survey before November 24th.

The first 20 co-ops to complete the survey will be entered in a draw for a \$100 Home Depot gift card so don't forget to give us your contact details!

Top of Form

1. Co-op name (required)

2. Contact name (optional)

3. Contact Email

4. Province

- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island

*5. Does your co-op have a sustainability policy in place?

- Yes
- No

Not sure

6. If no, would your board consider adopting one?

Yes

No

Not sure

7. If yes, how long has the sustainability policy been in place?

Less than one year

One to two years

Two to four years

Five years or more

Not sure

We do not have a policy in place

8. If yes, is it based on the CHF Canada Model Environmental Sustainability Policy?

Yes

No

9. Has your co-op completed any water-conservation measures? Check all those that apply.

Installing low-flow toilets

Installing water-saving devices (e.g., low-flow shower-heads)

Installing rain-barrels

Other (please specify)

10. Has your co-op completed any energy-conservation measures? Check all those that apply.

- Using power-saving light bulbs
- Buying EnergyStar appliances and equipment
- Converting electric systems to gas (e.g., heating, hot-water tanks)
- Installing energy-efficient windows, doors, air-exchange equipment or heating and cooling systems
- Upgrading insulation (e.g., attics, walls)
- Other (please specify)

11. Has your co-op completed any energy-conservation measures in common areas? Check all those that apply.

- Installing sensor-controlled lights
- Installing blinds that repel solar heat in summer and retain it in winter
- Maintaining a moderate temperature
- Installing solar panels
- Other (please specify)

12. Does your co-op have plans to reduce water and energy consumption in future?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

13. If yes, check all those that apply.

- Using power-saving light bulbs
- Purchasing EnergyStar equipment

- Turning off computers and other equipment when no one is in the office
- Using green power, such as wind power or solar panels
- Training members to report dripping taps promptly
- Educating members on water-conservation measures
- Encouraging members to turn down the heat in winter and use a fan instead of an air conditioner in summer
- Other (please specify)

14. If yes, check all those that apply for any common areas.

- Installing sensor-controlled lights
- Installing blinds that repel solar heat in summer and retain it in winter
- Maintaining a moderate temperature
- Other (please specify)

15. If no, are there any particular reasons why you do not have any plans to further reduce water and energy consumption?

- We've done as much as we can
- Our co-op can't afford it
- We don't have time
- The Board and/or members are unwilling
- Other (please specify)

16. Has your co-op commissioned an energy audit?

Yes

No

17. If no, what is the reason?

18. If yes, will you be able to adopt the recommendations as outlined in the report?

Yes, all of them

Yes, most of them

No, none of them

Other (please specify)

19. Has your co-op commissioned a building condition assessment (BCA)?

Yes

No

Not sure

20. If yes, did the BCA include recommendations for water and energy conservation?

Yes

No

Not sure

21. Does the co-op take a life-cycle costing approach to capital replacements?

Yes

No

Not sure

22. If no, would you like to learn more about life cycle costing?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

23. Has your co-op taken steps to reduce paper consumption?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

24. If yes, check all those that apply.

- Recycling paper
- Copying and printing on both sides
- Reusing scrap paper
- Holding paperless meetings
- Communicating with members by e-mail and postings on the co-op's website
- Buying paper products made from recycled material
- Other (please specify)

25. Do members in your co-op compost food waste?

- Yes
- No

26. If yes, how does composting take place? Check all those that apply.

- Municipal composting service
- Individual backyard composting

Multi-unit composting bins

Other (please specify)

27. If no, are there any particular reasons why composting is not offered? Check all those that apply.

Municipality does not offer composting service

Members not interested

Members afraid of attracting animals

Too messy

Too much nuisance

Other (please specify)

28. Does your co-op help its members recycle any items? Check all those that apply.

Batteries

Paint

Pressurised cans

Hazardous household products and equipment

Electronics (computers, TVs, mobile phones, tablets, etc.)

CFC light bulbs and/or fluorescent light bulbs

Furniture

Clothing

Other household items

No recycling of any kind is offered

Other (please specify)

29. Does your co-op use any environmentally friendly products or supplies? Check all those that apply.

Paint

Flooring

Cleaning products

FSC wood

None

Not Sure

Other (please specify)

30. When choosing suppliers or contractors, do you do any of the following? Check all those that apply.

Ask about their environmental practices

Favour fair-trade and fair-wage companies

Put information about our environmental sustainability requirements in our tender packages

Sustainability is not part of the consideration

Other (please specify)

31. What form of assistance would do most to help your co-op become more environmentally sustainable?

- Printed how-to guides or useful resources
- Links to websites with how-to guides or useful resources
- Workshops
- Posters
- Other (please specify)

Thank you for completing our survey!