

**Seventh Annual Regional Sustainable Development Forum:  
Being a Part of the Climate Change Solution:  
Individual Action for Collective Impact**

**January 25, 2008, MIT Sloan School of Management**

**Session 6: Actions for Sustainability at Home**

Interested in how you can bring sustainability best practices and climate change solutions into your everyday life? Participate in a session that will inspire you to make simple changes at home to help the environment and hear how you can advocate for change in your community.

Presenters:

**Susan Altman**, Outreach Manager, Massachusetts Climate Action Network (MCAN)

**Melissa Luna**, Director of Community Organizing, Sociedad Latina

**Naomi Mermin**, Consultant, National Center for Healthy Housing

Moderator:

**Lauren Baumann**, Senior Associate, New Ecology, Inc.

Presenters acknowledged that this is a very broad topic lending itself to the interests of a wide range of constituencies.

Brief introductions revealed the following affiliations/interests among participants:

- The Trustees for Reservations – focusing on energy efficiency in the management of ~ 60 buildings on properties statewide
- Masters of Public Policy student – desire to green apartment building living space
- Green Round Table intern – researching relationship/connection between high tech green buildings and natural buildings
- Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance
- Affordable housing development consultant
- Housing Corporation of Arlington
- Environmental Coordinator for the town of Dedham – working to educate citizens on greening houses
- Community farm/home owner – interest in outreach education
- Homeowner and student of environmental education – seeking to teach diverse populations
- Nuestra Comunidad – environmental planner
- Nonprofit Developer in Madison Park
- Nuestra Comunidad – project manager
- Technical writer – working to break into sector
- Career counselor – striving for affordability at home

- Beverly Affordability Housing Coalition
- Entrepreneur
- Fullbright fellow – collecting information on housing construction and NGO's to be applied at home (Brazil)
- Affirmative Investments – project manager

A show of hands indicates the audience is comprised of approximately 50% owners and 50% renters. About 90% of participants have taken at least some step toward greening their lives.

Susan Altman:

- Runs Low Carbon Diet program for MCAN – everyone is eligible for participation.
- Developed in 2007 to be part of the climate change solution, employing individual action for the collective benefit, based on the impact –voting concept.
- Americans are the problem; we need to do something right now; and it will take all of us – we all have a role.
- Aimed at “just folks” in Massachusetts.
- Common barriers to action include: Where to start? Which actions are most important? How to act?
- Program resources include: websites (<http://www.empowermentinstitute.net/lcd/> and <http://www.massclimateaction.net/lcl/home>), carbon calculator, trainings and community outreach.
- Marketing studies suggest that attitude follows behavior.
- Participants choose from among 24 actions leading to a 5000 lb. reduction in household green house gas emissions (GHGs) which amounts to approximately 10% of the average American family's carbon load.
- Measurements provide the motivation while other people's involvement keeps the interest high: participants work in 5-8 person teams, ideally organized around existing group structures such as school, work, etc.
- Currently, Massachusetts has 32 team leaders 32 towns across the state, but clustered around Boston.
- MCAN would like to expand program into outlying lower income communities such as Lawrence and Lowell.
- Plans for 2008 include: more training sessions, awards ceremony, collective carbon tracker with graphics, targeting of new towns outside I-495, keep people going.

Discussion:

Q: What is the most common action taken?

A: Not known.

Q: Do any similar or competing programs exist.

A: No. MCAN decided to take it on because there were no other state organizations doing it.

Melissa Luna:

- Sociedad Latina, located on Mission Hill, is concerned with making simple changes to your home's home community.
- Organizational challenges include: expansion of the surrounding world class institutions/universities encroaching on space and not giving back to the community – college students are not necessarily engaged with the community; health issues.
- Youth comprise 33% of the neighborhood population.
- What is advocacy? Advocacy is the act of arguing on behalf of a particular person, issue or idea.
- What is community organizing? Community organizing alters power dynamics, creating an engaged population. It is inclusive and aimed at making systemic changes.
- *Parcel 25: One Roxbury Crossing* [video presentation produced by youth for purposes of engaging other youth and educating the community] documents the past history and potential future renaissance of Parcel 25.
- A project advisory committee incorporating sustainable design developed through community vision.
- A next step is for youth to further engage residents.
- Ways to make systemic changes include: policy, preservation/creation of open space, green building/design incorporating community benefits packages.
- Existing challenges and opportunities include: Making the connections and making it real; air pollution; open space improvements; housing developments incorporating smoke-free homes; potential of green jobs as new employment sector for residents.

#### Naomi Mermin:

- The Boston One Touch Project (concentrated in Roxbury, North Roxbury and South Roxbury) strives for an integrated approach as green buildings alone won't necessarily make for a healthy living environment.
- In the context of urban housing infrastructure, this project compared all green guidelines looking specifically at health specs, ultimately producing a veritable Consumer Reports review of existing frameworks (available at the National Center for Healthy Housing website).
- Most programs are in silos (either healthy or green, for example), but there is great benefit in going in big all at once rather than taking a piecemeal approach.
- A major cost effective intervention with big pay-offs is the implementation of smoke-free and spray-free housing policies. (This is free and legal.)
- Smoking is the single biggest thing that can be done for health – nothing rivals the infiltration of second hand smoke.
- This policy also saves money at turnover time because there is a reduced need to replace carpet or repaint.
- Conventional pesticide use in homes does little to mitigate the insect/pest problem and yet the health effects of even relatively low concentrations remain largely unknown.
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategically uses lower volumes applied less frequently to achieve more effective results.

- As an energy conservation measure, improvements to the envelope are critical. Additionally, reducing uncontrolled air transit leads to mold reduction and a decrease in pest vectors.
- Proper ventilation must be ensured accordingly.
- Fixing water leaks is also a key target area followed by upgrades to water saving fixtures such as dual flush toilets, etc.

Discussion:

Q: How much of a residential electrical footprint is comprised of 'Phantom' plug loads?

A: They can account for up to 20% of residential electrical use.

Q: Don't smokers object to the smoke-free mandate?

A: Studies indicate that 90% of smokers actually prefer smoke free living spaces – see the Smoke Free Environments Project for details.