

# VOLUNTARY BLACKOUT DAY

## Woodstock Event Highlight of Summer of CDM Program Promotions

In Woodstock, a major community event was the highlight of a summer of CDM Program promotions. On the afternoon of August 14th, approximately 1,000 people attended a Woodstock Hydro-sponsored Voluntary Blackout Day community barbeque to commemorate the anniversary of the 2003 blackout.

The City of Woodstock originated the "Blackout Day Challenge" in 2005. The City's volunteer Environmental Advisory Committee convinced Woodstock City Council to issue a challenge to other Ontario communities to see how much energy they could save on the blackout anniversary. Woodstock Hydro supported the challenge, and the Independent Electricity System Operator agreed to take measurements that would compare the percentage drop in energy use for various municipalities that took up the challenge.

Now in its third year, Voluntary Blackout Day has become a community event, and a major opportunity for public education in Woodstock. The way it is promoted represents Woodstock Hydro's philosophy in creating awareness around all its CDM programs:

- Develop partnerships within the community - private sector partners, organizations and government. Partners can assist with resources, promotion, and sponsorship.
- Work closely with the local news media, combining news releases with strategically-placed advertising. Make maximum use of personal appearances on local radio and television. Put a high priority on Internet communications.

- Use inexpensive and "low-tech" promotions such as posters and signs.
- Generate community buzz using innovative and inclusive contests and giveaways. If possible, use local celebrities and prominent citizens to support the cause.
- A strong element of consumer education not only ensures coverage in news stories, but also increases the chance of lasting behaviour change. Knowledge empowers consumers.

Local partners for the Voluntary Blackout Day barbeque included the City of Woodstock, the local Environmental Advisory Committee, the Blackout Day Group, Union Gas and several local businesses.

Prior to the barbeque, Woodstock Hydro launched a contest encouraging people to submit their stories from the original blackout of 2003. To promote the contest, the local radio station ran 60-second vignettes of prominent Woodstock citizens relating their own blackout day stories. Advertising was also done in the local newspaper.

Through June and July, Woodstock Hydro partnered with a local business to give away soft ice cream cones in events they billed as "Peak Treat." The giveaway times coincided with traditional peak summer electricity consumption hours, and included an opportunity to sign up for Summer Sweepstakes and Peak Saver.

Events were supported by a summer-long advertising campaign using radio and newspaper. Radio spots included a taped Events were supported by a summer-long advertising campaign using radio and newspaper. Radio spots included a taped energy audit of the city's public library, and newspaper ads included a weekly word jumble, using words originating from the Every Kilowatt Counts web site. The word jumble formed the basis for a contest that gave away energy savings items to participants.

Tying community events to promotions and integrating advertising with the events has created significant community awareness of electricity conservation, and has raised the profile of Woodstock Hydro in the community. ■

