

CHAMPIONS

FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE

Ordinary people taking extraordinary action

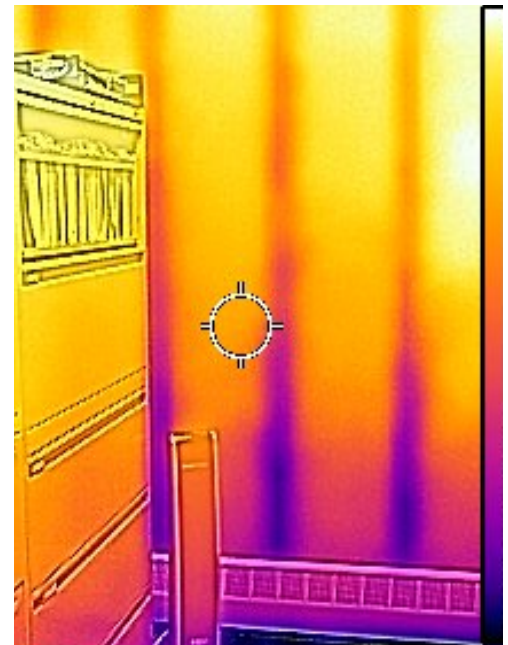
SOUTHERN SOLUTIONS; FINDING COMMON GROUND

This is an era of polarization. People seem to find it increasingly difficult to find common ground with others who do not share their views on the critical priorities for our society. But it doesn't need to be that way. A project in some southern Saskatchewan communities shows that it is possible to find space for some common ground.

Estevan and Weyburn are communities in southern Saskatchewan with economies that are driven by the extraction of fossil fuels. On the surface it would be easy to assume that members of these communities would not find much common ground with the Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES), an organization that has advocated for the reduction and eventual elimination of our dependence on fossil fuels for many years. But sometimes our differences help us challenge our assumptions, which in turn can help us find common ground.

A project named Southern Solutions that ran between 2021 and 2023 is an example of this. As part of that project the SES and 15 businesses in Estevan and Weyburn work together to explore opportunities to improve building comfort and save energy, water, and money. SES's technical team completed assessments of the businesses that provided building-specific recommendations, but generally included:

- Upgrading lighting and bathroom fixtures to reduce consumption
- Cleaning furnace filters to improve air quality and reduce energy use
- Installing programmable thermostats to maximize comfort while reducing gas costs
- Repairing/replacing weatherstripping and caulking
- Repairing broken doors to reduce cold drafts, gas use, and improve security
- Unplugging unused equipment to reduce utility costs
- Setting up energy monitoring and tracking to help identify changes and manage consumption



Thermal imaging of a wall

At the same time, over 100 building operators -- many from Estevan, Weyburn, Regina, Burstall, Swift Current and White Bear -- learned about optimizing lighting, electrical equipment, water and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems through the SES's Building Operator Training Program. The SES has run this program for many years, but the attendance at the 2023 session offered as part of this project had the best turn-out ever and many participants were enthusiastic about what they learned. For instance, several participants indicated that they would act on energy

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and water savings at home as well as at work, and that they would recommend the program to colleagues.

The SES also worked with eight elementary school classrooms which included almost 300 students, teachers and support staff. In addition to learning about climate change and renewable energy options, the students developed action projects. One class lobbied their school division to switch old compact fluorescent (CFL) light bulbs to more energy efficient Light Emitting Diode (LED) light bulbs and presented a play about energy conservation. Another class "stickered" all classroom light switches in their school to remind fellow peers and teachers to turn off the lights whenever they weren't needed.

The benefits of energy and water conservation was the common ground that project participants shared, regardless of their positions on bigger issues related to energy or water. Whether businesses, students or building operators, many participants appreciated learning practical approaches that would help them save money and benefit the environment at the same time. Bridges were built and everyone came out ahead.

This column is a collaborative project of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society and the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development – RCE Saskatchewan.



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areas include sustainable energy and climate solutions, water protection, resource conservation, biodiversity preservation, and reduction of toxic substances. Our work in Saskatchewan is carried out in Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and our office is in Saskatoon on Treaty 6, the traditional territory of Cree peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Learn more at: www.environmentalsociety.ca

Saskatchewan Environmental Society is a non-profit, registered charity that is committed to supporting sustainable living and sustainable resource use in Saskatchewan. We work with, and on behalf of, communities, organizations, businesses, and policy makers to encourage informed decision-making that moves us towards sustainability. SES's current action



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