

# 'Green Government Challenge' to provide localities with carbon emissions yardstick

**B**EGINNING THIS MONTH – and throughout 2008 – the Virginia Municipal League will provide its member local governments with helpful information and practical strategies designed to promote environmental responsibility.

VML's "Go Green Virginia" initiative, endorsed by the league's Executive Committee, recognizes that communities need to take innovative steps to reduce energy usage and promote sustainability.

The scientific community has reached a near consensus regarding global climate change. Earth is undeniably warming. This warming is principally the result of carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases from human activities. These human activities include burning fossil fuels (electricity generation and vehicles) and significant changes in land use (tree cutting and sprawl).

If the trends in greenhouse gas emissions continue, by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century global temperatures could increase by as much as 10 degrees. This warming would have significant consequences, such as submerging coastal areas, increasing the risk of droughts, floods and coastal storms, and severely threatening biodiversity and public health.

And for global warming skeptics, there is equally disturbing news. Our country's dependence on oil, especially foreign oil, continues to be staggering. Consider: the United States, with 5 percent of the world's population, uses about 25 percent of its oil. Consider: The United States consumes about 20 million barrels of oil a day, but only about 6 million of those barrels are produced at home. And in the past three years the price of a barrel of oil has risen from \$43 to \$100.

Just as the Earth's environment is fragile, the supply of oil and other fossil fuels is finite. According to some economists, without significant cultural reform this dependence will continue to hamper economic growth and eventually could have dire economic and social consequences when world oil production peaks but demand continues to rise. These consequences would be worldwide.



By Jay Fiset

The need to "think globally, act locally" has never been more appropriate. Local governments must begin to find energy efficiencies and sustainable land use policies to ensure their future quality of life. A number of states, including Virginia, as well as organizations such as the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties, are adopting policies and taking steps to address the problems. Many cities, towns and counties across Virginia are beginning to take action, too.

VML is poised to help its member local governments join in this important undertaking. Our "Go Green Virginia" initiative has several components that will unfold throughout the year, including a series of educational forums that will be held across the state this spring and publication of a "best practices" green book.

Most importantly, member local governments will be asked to participate in a friendly competition known as the Green Government Challenge. The "Challenge" is designed to encourage implementation of specific environmental policies and practical actions that reduce the carbon emissions generated by both the local government and the broader community. In addition, taking these actions can save local governments money.

The Green Government Chal-

lenge will work like this: Local governments will earn "green points" by implementing or adopting policies and actions listed in 11 categories. These categories will include: Adoption of Governmental Policy, Energy Efficiency, Green Buildings, Waste Management, Vehicles, Land Use/Transportation, Water/Air Quality, Employee Incentives, Education/Community participation, Schools and Innovation. Amassing at least 100 "green points" out of a possible 200 will earn a certification as a "Green Government." In addition, awards will be given to the top three jurisdictions in each of three population brackets (less than 15,000; 15,001-90,000; 90,001-plus). These awards and certificates will be presented at the 2008 VML Annual Conference.

While information regarding the Challenge will be mailed to members, local governments will register to participate on-line at [www.GoGreenVA.org](http://www.GoGreenVA.org) beginning at the end of January. Once registered, local governments can start completing the Challenge and implementing as many new actions and policies as possible. The Web site will provide detailed instructions, technical assistance and samples of actions already established by VML member jurisdictions. Refer to it often. Local governments will have until Sept. 30 to complete the Challenge and submit the necessary certification on-line or by mail.

Finally, please plan to attend one of the four Go Green Virginia regional forums this spring. Dates and locations will be announced soon. The forums will discuss many of the policies and actions described in the Challenge to achieve the "Green Government" certification, and will provide practical help for local governments to begin or advance their energy saving and sustainability efforts. I look forward to seeing you there as we work together on these important issues. 

## About the author

Jay Fiset is president of VML and a member of the Arlington County Board.