

World Environment Day - June 5

Briefing on ...

World Environment Day – Friday June 5

Introduction

UNISON has designated World Environment Day (WED), 5 June 2009, as ‘Green UNISON Day’. This briefing looks at our union’s current work on climate change and what Scottish branches might like to do to mark the day. UNISON offices across the UK will also be taking part in a range of WED activities.

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Background

World Environment Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. It is commemorated annually on 5 June and is one of the main ways that the UN raises worldwide awareness of the environment.

The theme for 2009 is “Your Planet Needs You – UNite to combat climate change”. The UN wants to empower people to become active on “sustainable and equitable

development”. Trade unions have campaigned locally and internationally on this agenda by calling for a “Just Transition” to a low-carbon economy. The March 2009 ‘Put People First’ demonstration in London focused on Jobs, Justice and Climate issues, demanding action from world leaders at the G20 summit.

WED 2009 is also focused on the urgent need for a new international climate change deal to be agreed at the UN talks in Copenhagen in December.

UNISON’s work on climate change

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges the world faces, with the December successor-to-Kyoto deal crucial to ensuring global action to protect the planet for current and future generations.

UNISON Scotland has been actively campaigning on climate change and the green workplace agenda as well as working with other organisations in the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition.

Information on our website about UNISON’s involvement on environmental issues includes:

- Details of how UNISON members around Scotland are working daily to protect

the environment. See UNISON Scotland’s Environment Manifesto, with 10 things to do to tackle climate change.

- Documents showing UNISON’s contributions to discussions around the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, currently going through the Scottish Parliament.
- Information on UNISON’s call for a climate change duty on public bodies to be part of the new legislation.
- Ideas for Green Workplace campaigning. More than half of greenhouse gas emissions come from the workplace..

There is still time to email your MSPs for a strong Bill www.unison-

scotland.org.uk/greenworkplace/respondmsp.html#form

UNISON has also prioritised environmental action within the organisation, launching several internal initiatives, including replacing bottled water with mains-

fed water coolers, installing video conferencing facilities and arranging to recycle paper and other waste.

Action in UNISON offices on June 5 should inspire further moves to reduce our carbon footprint.

Ideas for Branch Action around World Environment Day

One key step branches can take is to start the ball rolling in letting employers know you would like to negotiate a green workplace agreement. You could write an initial letter proposing this as a fitting way to mark WED and the run-up to Copenhagen. Many employers are already looking at ways to reduce carbon emissions as part of the Carbon Reduction Commitment, coming into force next year, or as part of commitments such as the Scottish Climate Change Declaration, which all Scottish councils have signed.

A model agreement, developed by the TUC, and a UNISON Greening the Workplace toolkit, are at www.unison.org.uk/green/pages_vie_w.asp?did=7384

Other ideas for WED action include:

- Hold a green 'fair' at work, with information about climate change and a way for people to check their carbon footprint: e.g. a computer where they can go online to use WWF's footprint calculator:

<http://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>

- Arrange an independent screening of the Pete Postlethwaite climate change film *The Age of Stupid*. www.ageofstupid.net
- Have a green travel day where people pledge to come to work by walking, cycling, using public transport or car sharing.
- Agree to send branch representatives to the Edinburgh World Justice Festival www.ewjf.org.uk (18-31May) and the June 20 event at the STUC in Glasgow on 'Climate Change and the Labour Movement'. This aims to establish a new network. Speakers: Stephen Boyd, STUC, Richard Leonard, GMB, and Matthew Crighton, from Edinburgh UNISON. Details from matthewcrighton@googlemail.com

Please let the Policy & Information Team know what you are doing.



Further Information

UNISON Scotland Green Workplace
www.unison-scotland.org.uk/greenworkplace

UNISON UK Green Issues
www.unison.org.uk/green

The TUC's excellent comprehensive handbook for union green representatives:

www.tuc.org.uk/extras/gogreenatwork.pdf

Email Fiona Montgomery, (see p1) to join UNISON Scotland's green network and receive Environment & other updates.