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Doing our bit to make
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UNISON North West: Green Week 2021

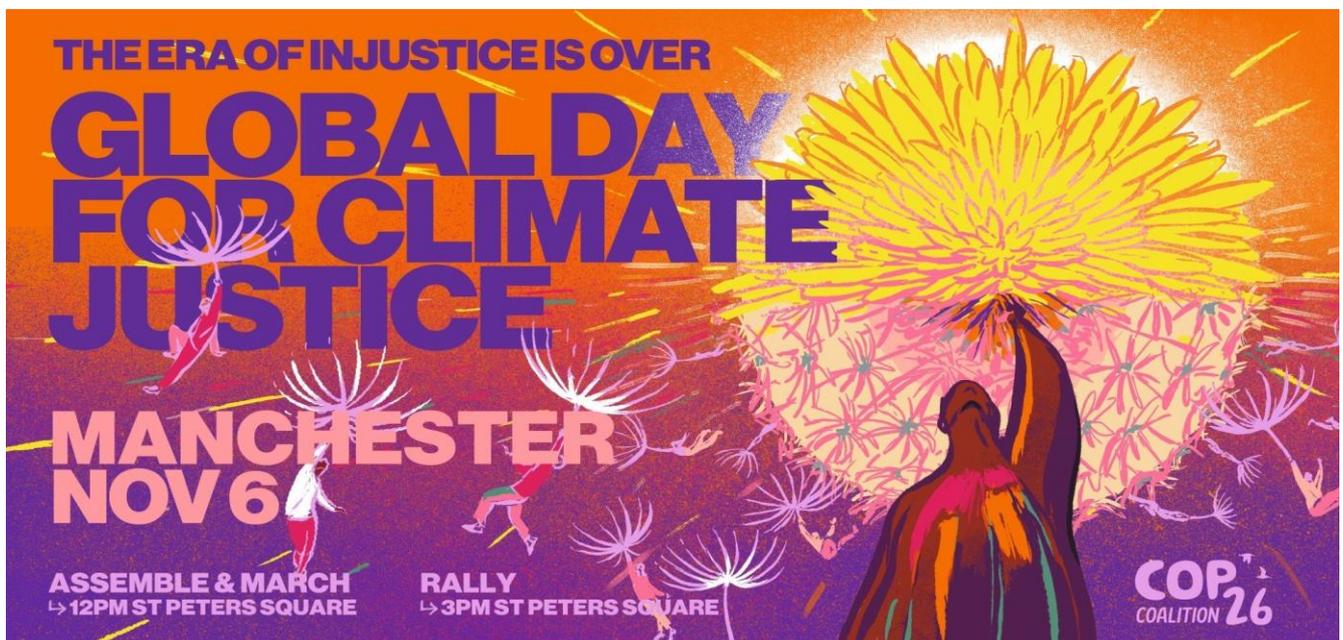
UNISON North West Climate Emergency Group call on UNISON members to stand together and take action on climate change

Green UNISON Week, Thursday 16- Saturday 25 September 2021, mirrors a Global Climate week building up to the Global *COP26 Climate Conference* in Glasgow in November. UNISON is calling on branches, activists and members to begin to think about the actions needed to provide a safer and more secure future for our families. The science is unequivocal, we must act fast. The economics is clear, it will cost more if we delay or do nothing. Yet if we act now there is still time to make a difference.

Public service workers will be at the heart of the changes needed to put our way of living on a secure footing to sustain better living going forward. From the civic leadership of local councils declaring local climate emergencies; to the decarbonisation of all our services; to fighting for a 'Just Transition' that provides new, well-paid green jobs, avoids waste, provides less needless commuting and a better work/life balance and quality of life- the climate emergency gives us an opportunity to bring changes that will make life better for all. Yet a danger lurks that politicians will talk the talk but do too little too late to fix the problems that threaten.

UNISON can make a difference by pressing employers to include climate change in their policies, by electing climate representatives to raise awareness and changes in the workplace and by lobbying politicians and working with other unions and partners. We can also lead by example in the way we organise as a union. This newsletter lays out the UNISON North West Climate Emergency Group's plans for Green Week.

COP26: 1st-12th November in Glasgow- more info inside!



Green Week- 10 things you can do!

UNISON Green Week is a chance to think about what UNISON can do for our environment. You can:

- Ensure that your branch has an Environmental Representative.
- Ask your employer what they are doing about Climate Change and to involve us workers.
- Hold or plan a Green event to raise awareness in your workplace.
- Take part in UNISON's Green survey which will be advertised during Green week.
- Sign up for UNISON's Green lunch time webinar at 12.30pm on Wednesday 23rd September 2021.
- Find out about training available to help green the workplace.
- Make plans for local activities that can feed into the COP26 Conference in Glasgow in November.
- Send messages of support or attend lunch time events in support of the Global School Strike on Friday 24th September.
- Share this newsletter as widely as possible.
- Talk to friends and family about this.

You can find more information here: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2021/09/get-set-for-green-unison-week/>

Green Representatives in the workplace

Green representatives, suitably trained, can help identify improvements in the workplace, much like Health and Safety Representatives. They can help the Branch formulate proposals to put to the employer or campaigns UNISON can get involved with.

Appoint an Environment Officer for your branch

Although not yet a required position in our rule book, branches need to identify someone who will prioritise this work, who can speak up on this at Branch meetings and help integrate the work needed into other UNISON work for our members.



UNISON fully committed to action on climate change

Tackling Climate Change is UNISON Policy. In 2021, key Conferences passed motions supporting urgent action on Climate Change. This includes backing a North West proposal to campaign for divestment of pension funds from fossil fuel investments, to protect our pensions and our future.

UNISON North West Climate Emergency Group

In November 2020, UNISON NW formed a new Climate Emergency Group. Mary Clarke, an Environmental Representative in Stockport Council led a group of UNISON activists who have been working on this for years but wanted UNISON to ramp up and broaden our commitment.



The group meets monthly every second Thursday, 6-7.30pm, online. We have devised a Climate Emergency Strategy, a toolkit for action for UNISON activists and members. We have discussed key issues, including how to make the workplace carbon neutral, urging pensions to divest from financially and socially unsustainable fossil fuels and how employers can work with UNISON to train members on what needs to be done.

Why not send a representative from your branch to the group or invite a speaker to your branch from the group? For further details contact j.hunter@unison.co.uk

COP26: 1st-12th November in Glasgow- get involved where you are!

UNISON has to be involved in putting public service workers' views at the heart of COP26. We face so many challenges just now, but tackling climate change is not a distraction, it reinforces our other priorities. If you were working on the Titanic, you would want your union steward to ensure good working practices and pay on the ship, but you would also need them to keep an eye on the big picture, to speak honestly to power and make sure those running the ship avoided the icebergs ahead. UNISON do campaign for members at work, but we need to make sure the natural base on which our civilisation rests has the support it needs to survive.

We also need to make sure that investment in the climate is paid for by those with the broadest shoulders. This helps everyone to do what needs to be done, to convert our homes, vehicles and workplaces so we can save energy and cost going forward. Every householder, every business or public authority spends money maintaining their buildings, machines infrastructure and equipment to ensure they can go on functioning. This is investment. The problem is no one has taken responsibility for the natural world upon which we rest- we have treated it as a free good to ravage or leave to others to look after. So the world needs to come together to look after the gift that will keep on giving. At a modest cost per year, we can turn things around. But this will not do itself. We need to make sure this Conference starts to put things right.

A Just Transition

If we do nothing, oil and gas will have to be discarded and living standards will fall. Those who now deny the threat, will shift to 'green austerity', making the workers do all the heavy lifting.

UNISON believes workers should be paid well, in secure jobs, to protect and sustain our way of life, and that the wealthiest, with the highest carbon footprint, should pay their fair share.

What you can do

Get involved in the activities of Green UNISON Week and in the run up, and during, the COP26 Conference (more details overleaf).

Think about putting yourself forward to get involved as a Green Rep or Environmental Officer.

Look out for UNISON guidance and materials on this and give us your views.

Learn how to suggest changes at work or what changes would give you a lower carbon footprint.

Where next

The COP26 Conference is an opportunity to agree actions. Yet the real task is to make change going forward. UNISON is in this for the long haul and will be ramping up our response going forward.

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You can get involved in a global day of protest on Saturday 6 November to give focus to the decision makers at the COP26 Climate Change Conference. Major demonstrations will take place in big cities but look out for events in towns and villages across our region.

In Glasgow itself, UNISON Scotland will be leading our activities and have been working on this for over a year. Whilst some activists and members may wish to travel to Glasgow, it is important that people across the country can get involved and hear our views and plans.

Decentralised activities across the world are being co-ordinated by the COP26 Coalition Hub. You can look for local details on their website: www.cop26coalition.org

Global School Strikes

UNISON can show support for young people concerned about their future during the school climate strikes on 24 September and 5 November.

UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea said: "Green UNISON Week gives young people a global space to demand politicians take seriously the damage being done to our planet and act to save its future.

"To support young people's demand, we'll be encouraging branches to talk to employers on how they can reduce their own carbon footprints, but more importantly, ensure their employers have a plan to green their workplaces completely. That way we can all begin to make a big difference quickly."

UNISON Greening Public Services Report

UNISON will be at the COP26 Conference with other unions across the world making sure the voices of workers and public services are heard. We are supporting unions from the Global South so they can have a say on behalf of those hit hardest but least to blame.

The most important UNISON contribution during this period will be the launch in Glasgow of the union's "Greening Public Services" report on Monday 8 November.

The Report will review governments' green funding and suggest models of green transformation that will benefit services, protect jobs, promote re-skilling and training of current jobs and provide new green roles.

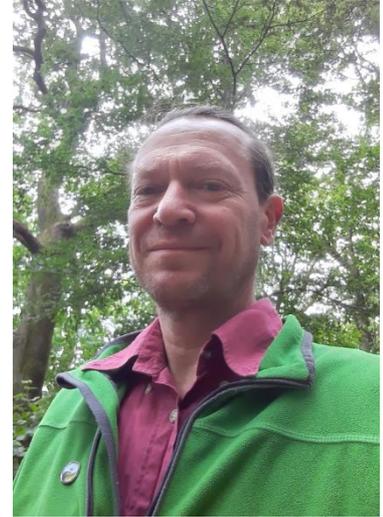
Zero carbon in your workplace- and home

By Martin Sleath, UNISON North West Climate Emergency Group leading activist and Cumbria Local Government Branch Environmental Officer

We know we have precious little time in which to turn the carbon emissions supertanker around, and that governments bear great responsibility for bringing policies and budgets into line to achieve this – hence the focus on COP26. However, action is needed at all levels: achieving net zero as a nation needs every organisation - public and private - and every household to do what they can to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Save the world at work

UNISON members have a tremendous opportunity to make a difference in the workplace:



- Numbers:

Over 1.3 million members and activists represent a powerful force for change.

- Organisations:

Many of us work for local authorities and other organisations which are highly influential in local policy-making, designing services and infrastructure and deciding priorities for funding.

- Jobs:

Not only that, but many of us do jobs which have a direct bearing on carbon emissions – waste collection, transport, town and country planning and facilities management, to name but a few.

So how can you make a difference?

- **Ask your employer if your organisation measures its carbon footprint – and if not, why not?**

The most important first step towards reducing emissions is to investigate the sources of those emissions. Being asked the question by you will emphasise to your employer that the workforce cares about the organisation's environmental reputation.

- **Ask your employer if your organisation has a net zero, carbon reduction or other kind of sustainability strategy or plan.**

Reducing emissions doesn't happen by magic – it requires forward planning. A sustainability strategy needs to involve every aspect of the operation such as procurement, waste and investments– not just the obvious things like buildings and



transport. Crucially it needs to involve everyone, from the boardroom to the shop floor.

- **Ask your employer to provide carbon literacy training for all staff.**

Most of us have heard by now about the greenhouse effect and seen news items about extreme weather and melting ice sheets, but how well do we understand how our lifestyles impact upon the climate crisis? Carbon (or climate) literacy training is crucial in getting a better understanding of the facts in order to make more informed decisions about how to start tackling the problem at work and at home. Check out <https://carbonliteracy.com/> as a starting point.

Save the world from home

It's always tempting to point the finger at other people, businesses or nations when looking for environmental scapegoats, but we all have a responsibility to look at our own lifestyles and see what we can do to reduce our carbon emissions. After all, those big smoke-spewing factories in China are making stuff to satisfy our consumerist demands!



Again, a good starting point is to find out your own carbon footprint. This will help you to understand which aspects of your life are causing the most carbon emissions and therefore what needs to change first. There are several on-line carbon calculators such as the WWF's <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/>

A few hints and tips:

- **Don't try to do everything at once** – take a step-wise approach, starting with the easiest or cheapest things that make the most difference, such as installing loft insulation.
- **Think about what's most essential in life, as well as what scores the highest numbers.** For instance, heating our homes burns a lot of carbon – but you do need to be warm. Whereas overseas flights are a less painful thing to cut back on.
- **Swim against the tide of materialism.** We are bombarded with adverts and keeping-up-with-the-Joneses pressures to constantly want more; but everything we buy costs carbon to produce and will probably mostly end up in landfill. Every pound you spend can either make the world a better place or a worse place, so shop mindfully: think about where that product has come from, who made it, whether you really need it, how much use or pleasure you will get out of it, and what will happen to it once you've finished with it.
- Finally – **be positive!** It can sometimes seem that being green is all about having to give fun things up. We have sleepwalked into a way of life in which we accept polluted air, cheap plastic goods and sitting in traffic jams as inescapable. But a low-carbon society is also a society in which the air is breathable, the streets are safer, your neighbourhood is full of nature again, you are healthier and you have more time for your family and community. What's not to like?!

Why we should all be concerned about the climate crisis

By Mary Clarke, UNISON North West Climate Emergency Group Chairperson and Stockport Local Government Branch Environmental Officer

Tasked with writing a short article about 'why we should all be concerned about the Climate Crisis', I was struggling to know where to start. It's such a massive issue, as anyone who understands the science behind it will tell you. But, given that not everyone who's reading this will be 'carbon literate', I'm going to skip the scientific element and focus on just one of several points which demonstrate why we should all be concerned: food.



Cast your minds back to the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Maybe you had to queue for an hour or so to get into the supermarket for your weekly shop? Maybe you were lucky and managed to pick up everything on your list? Maybe, like many other shoppers across the globe, you arrived at the toilet roll aisle only to find the shelves were empty? Panic buying everywhere led to limited availability of many items of course, not just toilet rolls. Many supermarkets were rationing items – only a certain number were allowed per customer. Excessive price hikes were seen everywhere, particularly amongst face mask and hand sanitizer retailers, and you couldn't find dry pasta or flour for baking anywhere. We were just not prepared for this. We're all so used to being able to pick and choose what we want, when we want, with 'next day delivery' often an online option.



In recent months, headlines have again focused on supply chain problems, caused in part by a nationwide shortage of HGV drivers but also as a result of EU workers (who pick, pluck, prepare, process & pack our food) leaving the UK. Again we are seeing reduced stocks and choices on our supermarket shelves and grocery prices are reported to have risen by 1.3% in September. And let's not forget that Nando's and KFC ran out of chicken in August.

Whether rationing for groceries and other household goods will be brought back remains to be seen but it's certainly a possibility in the run-up to Christmas.

Now let's look at the Climate Crisis and the effects of resultant extreme weather events on our day to day lives in so far as food (a basic necessity) is concerned.

Climate change is a major factor when it comes to food availability and prices. Extreme weather events affect both livestock and crops. Let's take wheat as an example, where the UK harvest for last year was reported to be 30% down according to reports from the National Farmers Union. This was the worst harvest in 30 years and the quality of the wheat which was recovered was described as 'variable'. Whilst farmers had experienced good growing conditions over the Summer, the severe thunderstorms and mini-heatwave

that followed took their toll on Autumn's harvest. The problems had however started earlier in the year, in early February, when Storms Ciara and Dennis battered many regions of the UK causing widespread flooding. Storm Jorje soon followed and many farmers found they were unable to plant seeds. The dry Spring that followed made germination difficult and in many areas delayed. So it was a poor start to the growing season.



As a result, the UK, normally a net exporter of grain, was forced to import supplies. Fortunately in 2020, grain harvests had held up in other parts of the world – but of course, that will not always be the case. Food is a globally traded commodity today, so climate events in one region can raise prices and cause shortages across the globe. Another example is the 2013 & 2014 drought in Brazil which caused Arabica coffee bean prices to double. Experts predict that, as

the effects of Climate Change worsen, global food shortages will become frequent occurrences – and that, of course, means increased prices for us at the check-outs.

To further compound the situation, it is known that, as average temperatures across the world warm and rainfall increases (in frequency and/or intensity), more pathogens (bacteria, viruses and other disease-causing microorganisms) will thrive and affect plant health – harvests will be down and food will spoil.

Climate change is also affecting pollinators, with over 40% of insect species already threatened with extinction. Three-quarters of our crops rely on insects for pollination – without pollinators we face losing some of the crops and varieties that we currently enjoy.

There are, of course, many other knock-on effects resulting from Climate Change that we may well experience and I'm hoping that there will be opportunity to expand on these in further newsletters. In this first instance however, I opted for 'food' as it's something we can't do without and we can all relate to!

