The background features a vibrant green color palette with various shades of green. On the left side, there are several green leaves with prominent veins, some appearing to be part of a branch. Overlaid on the entire background are numerous light green, semi-transparent decorative swirls and circular patterns of varying sizes, creating a sense of movement and organic growth.

# HEALTHY, CLEAN & GREEN

A Workers' Action Guide to a Greener Workplace

**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees



# GET STARTED!

So, **you're ready** to take action at your workplace on environmental issues. Great! This green workers' guide focuses on **actions and solutions**. It's a tool and a source of **ideas** for workers to paint their workplace green.





# DO UNIONS CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

**Yes!** For decades unions have been fighting for improved quality of life for their members. This includes improved environmental quality.

Unions are fighting for the elimination of pollutants and hazardous substances that are harmful to workers' health and to the environment. **Unions work to strike a balance** between economic stability and environmental protection. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has worked for many years **to preserve healthy and liveable communities**. Now more than ever we know that communities must be green and sustainable to be healthy and vibrant.



# IS CLIMATE CHANGE A UNION ISSUE?

**Yes!** Workers care about the planet, jobs and clean and liveable communities. Our workplaces burn energy, consume resources, and generate waste. All contribute to climate change. Workers know **climate change is real** and is happening now. They know that workplaces, like communities, individuals, government and business must get going to stop climate disaster.

Workers know that **collective action can make big changes**. We need collective action to stabilize the climate.

Workers also know that jobs will be affected. There will be more work in some areas, as the economy greens and steps are taken to adapt to a new climate. But some jobs may be lost, in some forms of power generation, for example. CUPE supports **a just transition program for workers** who are **affected by climate change**. This means CUPE supports minimal job loss, and government and employer commitments to support and retrain workers affected by climate change job losses.



**WORKPLACE ACTION ON  
CLIMATE CHANGE**



## Take action now! Here's how:

- **Speak up** at work, within your union, at home and in your community about climate change. Tell people why climate change must be dealt with right away. Let them know what you're doing and what actions they can take.
- Form an **environment committee** at your workplace and/or within your union.
- Write a **climate change policy** for your workplace.
- **Set greenhouse gas (GHG) cutting strategies** for your workplace. For example, look where you can make changes at work around transportation and energy use to cut greenhouse gases.
- Start conservation programs at work. For example, educate workers on conserving electricity by **turning off unnecessary equipment** and lights to conserve power.
- **Don't idle** car, truck or vehicle engines. This will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions while working. Many CUPE jobs involve driving.
- Set up or expand **workplace recycling** and composting programs to cut waste.
- Do **environmental audits** to find areas at work that could be made more efficient and less climate damaging.

# ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS AT WORK





## Take action now! Here's how:

- **Be part of the solution** – workers must be involved in environmental monitoring at work.
- **Tackle environmental issues in the workplace** – workers and union representatives must have the right to deal with environmental issues at work.
- **Educate workers on environmental issues.** Workers must be provided with training on environmental issues specific to their work. Workers should be provided with **union-delivered environmental training** when available.
- **Negotiate environment-friendly measures into collective agreements**, for example, with respect to energy, waste and greenhouse gas emissions.



# WASTE REDUCTION, RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING



## Take action now! Here's how:

Insist your employer set up a waste reduction program that would:

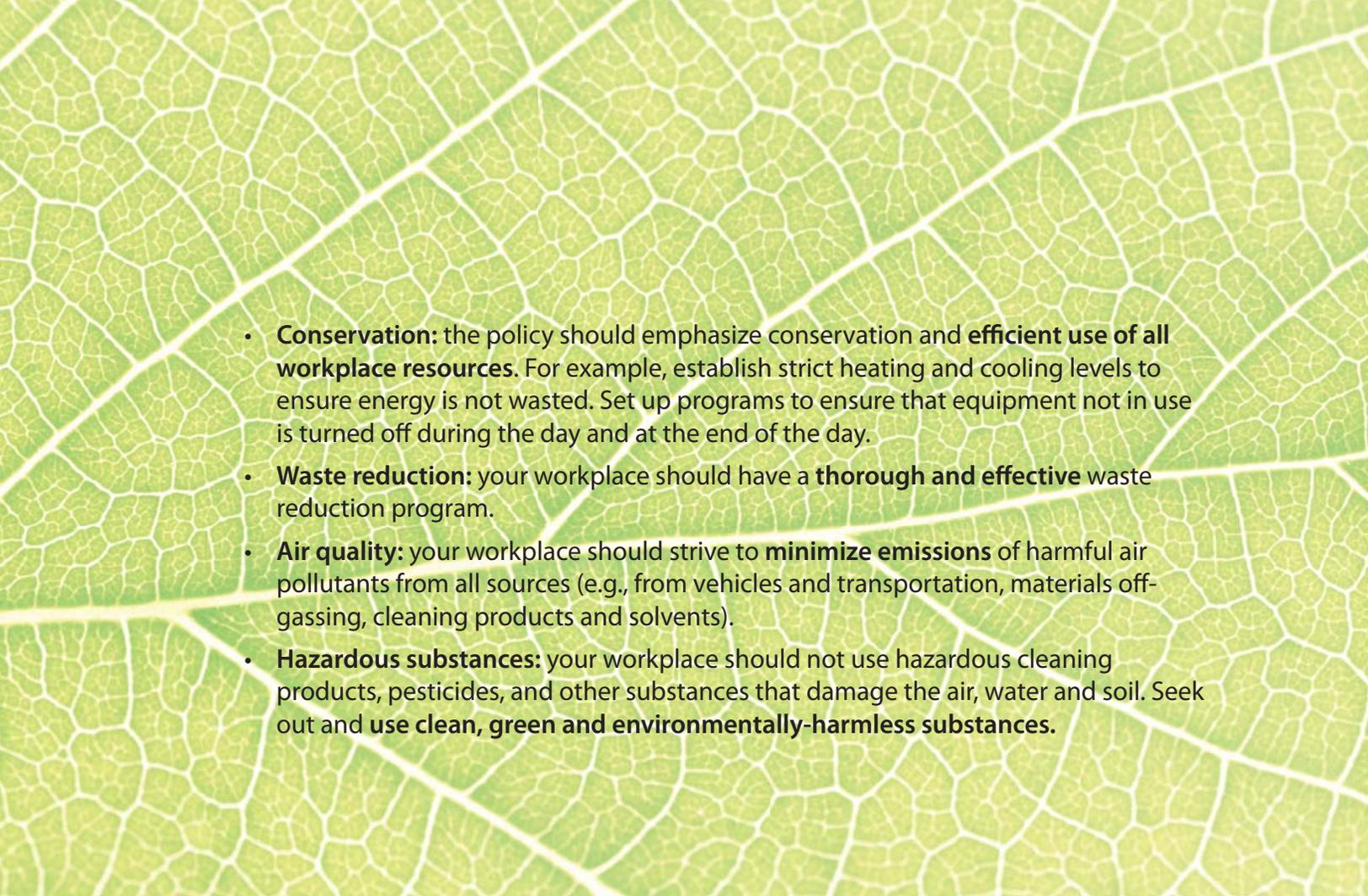
- **Assess** waste generation at your workplace to determine where changes need to be made.
- **Create solutions.** These can include: guidelines for using fewer resources to generate less waste (for example, set up a program that cuts the use of disposable products/materials to an absolute minimum); recycling programs; reusing programs (for example, can you donate materials so that they do not end up in landfill?); composting programs for food waste.
- **Educate workers** so that the solutions work. For example, don't assume workers are familiar with recycling or composting programs. Educate them and they will participate. Show them why eliminating disposable and unnecessary products is vital to reducing waste.
- **Monitor** the solutions to see if they work. Has waste been cut back? Are workers participating? If not, why?
- Make further changes to **keep the programs lively and challenging.** Waste reduction and diversion is an ongoing activity where improvements are always possible.

# GREENING YOUR WORK



## Take action now! Here's how:

- Bargain an **environment committee** for your workplace.
- The committee would be responsible for conducting workplace environmental audits. Audits **assess the environmental impact of work**. They also look for ways to improve a workplace's environmental practices.
- Set a **workplace environmental policy** that could cover:
  - A broad statement on **how your workplace will strive to reduce its negative environmental impact** and make changes to improve its environmental record.
  - How **sustainability** will underscore your work.
  - **Climate change**: the policy should set a **target for greenhouse gas reductions** and spell out how those targets will be met.

- 
- **Conservation:** the policy should emphasize conservation and **efficient use of all workplace resources**. For example, establish strict heating and cooling levels to ensure energy is not wasted. Set up programs to ensure that equipment not in use is turned off during the day and at the end of the day.
  - **Waste reduction:** your workplace should have a **thorough and effective** waste reduction program.
  - **Air quality:** your workplace should strive to **minimize emissions** of harmful air pollutants from all sources (e.g., from vehicles and transportation, materials off-gassing, cleaning products and solvents).
  - **Hazardous substances:** your workplace should not use hazardous cleaning products, pesticides, and other substances that damage the air, water and soil. Seek out and **use clean, green and environmentally-harmless substances**.



# CUPE TAKES ACTION

Autumn 2007 CUPE National moved to a **new, state-of-the-art office** complex with many progressive environmental features. The building in Ottawa meets **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)** standards. LEED is a Green Building Rating System – an internationally accepted standard for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings.

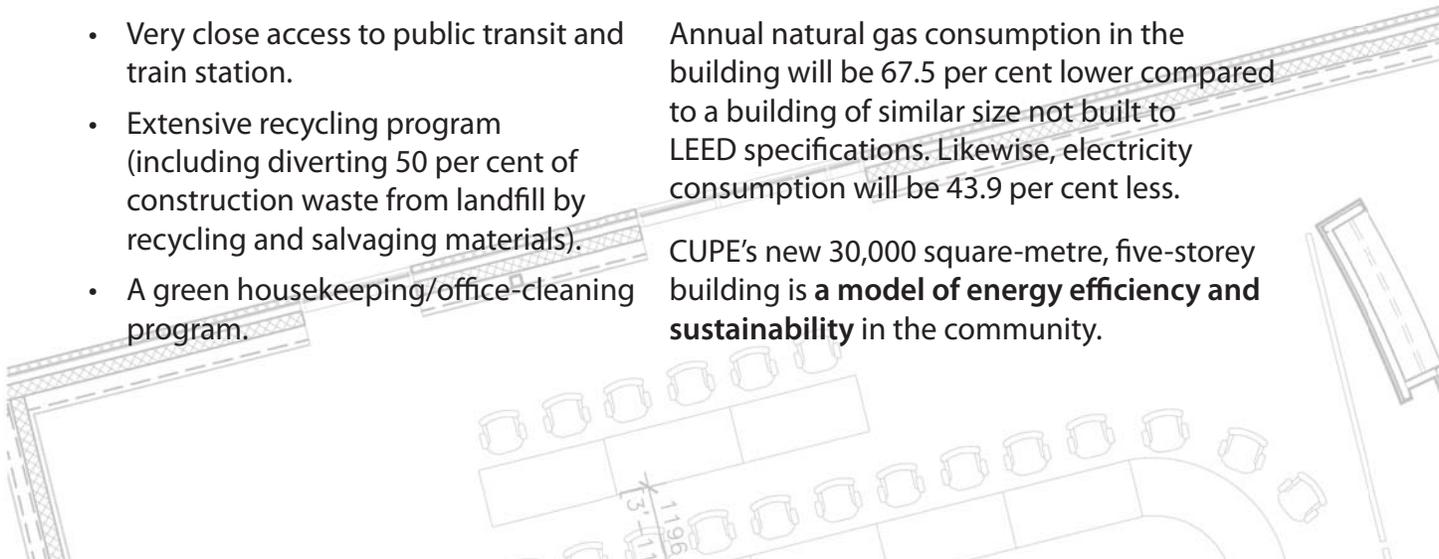
Here are some of the **environmental features** of the new CUPE National building:

- Energy-efficient fluorescent lighting throughout the building.
- Solar panels.
- Dual flush toilets and low-flow sink faucets.
- Very close access to public transit and train station.
- Extensive recycling program (including diverting 50 per cent of construction waste from landfill by recycling and salvaging materials).
- A green housekeeping/office-cleaning program.
- Native species landscaping.
- Energy-efficient heating, cooling and ventilation system.
- No irrigation system.

The building also houses a **teleconferencing centre**. It will be used to help **reduce the harmful effects of travel** on the climate.

Annual natural gas consumption in the building will be 67.5 per cent lower compared to a building of similar size not built to LEED specifications. Likewise, electricity consumption will be 43.9 per cent less.

CUPE's new 30,000 square-metre, five-storey building is a **model of energy efficiency and sustainability** in the community.





## OTHER GREEN WORK

CUPE Local 1169 represents library workers in Calgary. **The new Crowfoot Library meets LEED qualifications.** The library boasts these environmental features:

- The first building to be designed and constructed under the City of **Calgary's new Sustainable Policy.**
- Extensive **recycling and material salvage** to reduce construction waste.
- Energy Star™ compliant roofing material; louvered windows to cut heat absorption and reduce cooling requirements in the summer months.



- **Maximum use of natural daylight** to cut down the electricity requirements for illuminating the library.
- Very low volatile organic compound (VOC) content paints, carpets, and adhesives used throughout the building.
- **On-demand water heating** to save energy over standard tank heaters.
- Hardy planting materials that will be watered with a high-efficiency drip irrigation system, **saving tens-of-thousands of litres of water each year.**

The library serves approximately 100,000 Calgarians who live in the north-west region of the city.



# CUPE TAKES COMMUNITY ACTION

## Here's how:

### **Earth Day – April 22**

CUPE has promoted **labour's participation** in Earth Day events for several years. CUPE also uses Earth Day as a springboard to **workplace action** on environmental issues. CUPE has urged locals to start or expand recycling programs in their workplaces, conduct environmental audits on or near Earth Day and to pass an Earth Day declaration or resolution that strives for **sustainability at work and in the community.**

## Earth Day poster contest

CUPE's National Environment Committee established an Earth Day poster drawing contest for kids in 2003. The idea is to get kids to represent their environmental concerns, solutions and actions in a hand-drawn poster.



The contest has been a huge success. Entire classrooms of young students have taken up the contest and use it to start conversations about environmentalism. Each year, hundreds of children from Canada and abroad take part.



**Clean Air Day – early June on the Wednesday of Canadian Environment Week**

The CUPE National Environment Committee has urged CUPE locals to take action on Clean Air Day. For example, locals are encouraged to join the commuter challenge, a national endeavour that tries to change how people get to and from work. It promotes public transit, bicycle commuting and walking as ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous airborne pollutants.



# GET GOING!

Workers know that the environment matters. We need a healthy, clean, and green environment to have good jobs and strong communities. Take action now on the environment. Take the ideas in this booklet and get going in your workplace!

## Helpful resources and links

Other CUPE environmental publications:

CUPE has published a series of fact sheets on climate change

<http://www.cupe.ca/environment>

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/>

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/theme/index.cfm?theme=sustainableworkplace>

[http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/health\\_safety\\_\\_envir](http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/health_safety__envir)

<http://www.cen-rce.org/>

<http://www.ipcc.ch/>

<http://www.pembina.org/index.php>

<http://www.climatesolutions.org/>



# HEALTHY, CLEAN & **GREEN**

A Workers' Action Guide to a Greener Workplace



**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees