

Every hour is Earth Hour;

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Byline: RICHARD MITCHELL;

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When clocks around the world struck 8:30 Saturday night, millions of people turned off lights and other energy-eating gadgets for 60 minutes, all part of the flourishing global support for the symbolic gesture that is Earth Hour.

In the three years since the World Wildlife Fund launched Earth Hour as a way to let people make a statement about climate change, participation has soared. That 2007 event, basically limited to Australia, saw more than two million homes and business turn off the lights to reduce consumption and embody a green attitude. The next year Earth Hour went viral, and it is estimated that more than 50 million people participated.

This year 105 countries and more than 200 cities formally signed on, and it is estimated that one of every seven people on the planet were moved to pull a plug or flick a switch. That's more than a billion people.

Sustainability has emerged as the defining issue of our era, and last November the Council of Ontario University Presidents reinforced this by announcing university communities are deeply aware of the challenges facing the world arising from climate change and the degradation of natural environment.

As co-chair of the Sustainability Co-ordinating Committee at **Brock University**, I've been asked to help promote this new tradition of shutting off the lights across campus. And as I do, I am reminded of something a student suggested to me -- that, for anyone under 30, sustainability "is the human rights of the 21st century."

Brock is located within the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve -- a unique distinction for any Canadian university -- selected as such by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1990. This Reserve runs 725 kilometres from the Niagara River to the Bruce Peninsula, and contains wetlands, cliff faces, slopes and aquatic ecosystems. So Brock has potential to show real leadership. Are we doing enough?

Well, Brock's Sustainability Co-ordinating Committee was struck in the past year as both a practice-oriented and research-driven initiative looking to shrink our campus carbon footprint. Sustainable development is defined in Our Common Future, the UN report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Personally, as a new father, social scientist and citizen of the globe, I'm further challenged by writers such as Florida law professor and New York Times columnist Stanley Fish, who claims I should be "saving the world on my own time." Or Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who argues that unless I am promoting new approaches towards creating knowledge and teaching, I play a tacit role in the corporate machinery of greed and overconsumption taking the planet close to the edge of its capacity to support seven billion humans.

As for Earth Hour, most of us will be heartened by its huge public support. Having become conditioned to the foot-dragging or indifference of most governments and corporate titans, this global embrace is a reassuring indication that most of us get it -- we recognize the need to find more ways we can all do something about climate change. Of course, much more is called for (like banning the ubiquitous plastic water bottle on my campus to start).

What bothers me is what happened at 9:30 on Saturday night, when Earth Hour ended -- lights went back on and we resumed our lifestyle habits, feeling gratified for doing our part for an hour or so. While acknowledging my own share of the profligate carbon consumption pattern of living in the northern hemisphere, I was pleased to support the notion of shutting off my lights Saturday night for an hour.

But let's not lull ourselves into thinking this is enough. The hard truth is that every hour is Earth Hour, and every day Earth Day, and each of us behaves as either part of the solution or part of the problem.

Richard C. Mitchell is associate professor child and youth studies and co-chair of the Sustainability Co-ordinating Committee at Brock University.

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