



Greening the workplace

UNISON's policy on climate change, the environment and the workplace





Foreword

UNISON, climate change and the environment



The scale of the challenge facing our civilisation as a consequence of climate change is well documented.

Scarcely a week goes by without further stark evidence that, unless we take urgent action, we face catastrophic consequences. Most recently the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said that there may be just eight years to tackle rising emissions and avoid the worst effects of climate change. These are likely to include a surge in ocean levels, destruction of vast numbers of natural habitats and species, economic devastation in tropical zones and mass human migrations.

As this short introductory guide demonstrates, UNISON has a role to play on a number of levels. We can all play a part by thinking about the way in which we use resources, by reducing waste and energy use and recycling. Here we will be building on firm foundations. We are not recent converts. There is a tradition of environmentalism in UNISON that speaks volumes about who we are as individuals and as an organisation. We have had an environmental policy since our foundation, and have always sought to take measures to reduce our carbon footprint.

But we do recognise that we have to raise our game. That is why we are developing new tools and resources to support members to put climate

change and wider environmental issues on the bargaining agenda and to respond to new government initiatives aimed at improving environmental performance across the public services and utilities.

Of course, tackling change and improving our environment will also require major policy changes at a national and an international level. It will demand the concentrated efforts of world leaders, revolutionary changes in energy and transport policy and far reaching changes in patterns of consumption. Seen in this wider context, we should also recognise the role UNISON can play as a campaigning organisation – pressing the government to take meaningful action to tackle climate change and make sustainable choices on energy, transport and industry.

This document provides further details on our policy and work programme. Hopefully it will be a useful resource in an ongoing dialogue about how we can help tackle climate change and promote a genuinely sustainable future.

Dave Prentis

General secretary

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment

This document sets out UNISON's policy on climate change and the environment. It also includes some information about how we take our policy forward in all workplaces, and as part of a wider campaign. The focus of the document is climate change, for the simple reason that climate change is the greatest environmental challenge facing us. However, the scope of the document is far wider and reflects our commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability. This section sets out the context and our policy position. The second section talks about how we put policy into practice.

Taking the temperature

If we are to avoid catastrophic climate change, action needs to be taken by all nations to keep temperature rises to a maximum two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times. To keep temperature rises under control we need to reduce significantly the amount of greenhouse gases (eg carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide) that are released into the atmosphere.

The overwhelming weight of scientific evidence suggests that anything above two degrees could trigger the melting of the Greenland ice shelf and the collapse of the Amazon rainforest. This in turn would trigger even greater climate change as it would lead to the earth itself releasing more greenhouse

gases into the atmosphere.

The impact of any climate change is serious, but the implications of a temperature rise above two degrees would be devastating. Millions would die and be displaced by droughts and flooding, particularly in the developing world.

It is clear that the scale of the challenge facing the world requires a comprehensive package of far-reaching policy measures and unprecedented behavioural change. Some of these measures and changes translate into practical actions that we should all be involved in. Others require action by governments at home and internationally. The focus of UNISON's policy is on those areas where we can contribute most:

- as a trade union
- as an organisation committed to public services, at home and internationally
- as a champion of sustainability and international social justice, prepared to engage in policy debates and campaigns to stand up for what it believes in.

Putting the environment on the workplace bargaining agenda

More than half of carbon emissions are work related. The public sector alone, where most of our members work, accounts for five million tonnes of carbon emissions a year. On this basis it's fair to conclude that tackling climate change means changing the way we work. This in turn means consulting and negotiating with trade unions on issues like:

- energy use and energy conservation at work

- waste and recycling
- travel
- water use
- environmental education.

It will also, in the longer-term transition to a low carbon economy, involve changing the jobs that we do and affect the types of organisation we work for as well as training for employment etc.

It is clear that trade unionists recognise the need to tackle climate change and see the benefits of more environmentally friendly ways of working.

According to a recent YouGov survey, 70 per cent of workers said they would like to do more about climate change but felt they needed more support from their employers. Only a fifth thought their employer was doing enough. The Labour Research Department survey of nearly 700 union reps found that reps were frustrated with the slow pace of action by employers. *Go Green At Work: A handbook for union green representatives, Trades Union Congress, 2008*

Our policy is to support members and activists to put environmental issues on the bargaining agenda.

Clearly there are challenges here. Our role has traditionally been about getting things for our members. But in some respects, tackling climate change will mean giving things up. Our role in relation to green measures at work, therefore, must include ensuring that such measures, for

example around staff car parking and travel, are introduced fairly. The workforce must be actively engaged in negotiating change, rather than at the sharp end of measures that are imposed from on high.

To such ends we also have to push the government to ensure that trade union reps who take on environmental roles are supported at work. That is why we continue to lobby for an amendment to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service's (ACAS) code of practice for time off for trade union duties to include trade union environmental representatives. But until that right is secured we will support branches to win this right at workplace level.

The role of public services in tackling climate change

The public services and the public sector as a whole have an enormous role to play in tackling climate change and in promoting sustainability.

The LGA, LGE and local government unions should develop green/low carbon workplaces in every local authority so that the 2.1m local government employees adopt energy-efficient working practices. Pilots building on the TUC's Green Work Places initiatives should begin by June 2008.
A climate of change: final report of the LGA climate change commission, Local Government Association, 2007

- Energy use in the NHS costs £400 million annually and results in one million tonnes of carbon.
- Five per cent of all the UK's emissions from road transport are attributable to NHS related journeys. Staff patients and visitors travelled nearly 25 billion passenger kilometres for NHS related purposes in 2001, 85 per cent of them by car or van.
- One in every 100 tonnes of domestic waste in the UK comes from the NHS, most of which goes to landfill.

*'Taking the temperature'
NHS Confederation 2007*

Every year, public services spend £10 billion on energy, about £125 billion on goods and services, billions on new buildings, and more than £8 billion on uniforms and food (Sustainable Procurement Task Force, 2006). The NHS alone has a huge carbon footprint.

UNISON's believes that we need a more systematic approach to tackling climate change and achieving sustainability across the public services. This should involve better practice on:

- public procurement
- new public service buildings
- how the public services manage their affairs on a day to day basis.

Progress is being made. Some useful initiatives are being developed in the NHS and in local government. The new performance framework for local government includes performance indicators relating to the local authority's role in reducing emissions from its own estate and the community that it

serves. It also sets out responsibilities relating to adapting to the climate change that is already inevitable. Likewise the carbon reduction commitment, due to be introduced in 2010, will introduce a cap and trade system covering large service sector organisations. This is likely to include all top tier local authorities and many health trusts. Whether these measures are robust enough remains to be seen. However, what is clear is that the government and others recognise the need to engage trade unions and the workforce in change.

Government wishes to emphasise the importance of employee engagement and training as a core part of a robust carbon management and reduction strategy. Government recognises that leading organisations support and enable staff to actively contribute to energy management through a variety of approaches. Such approaches include, for example, joint environmental committees involving employees; staff awareness and energy training initiatives; and – in those cases where a trade union is recognised for collective bargaining purposes – taking forward energy and environment issues within the scope of such agreements.
Implementation proposals for the Carbon Reduction Commitment, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2008

It is clear to us that such an approach has the potential to represent a win-win over time, as the flip side of energy efficiency will be lower energy bills, meaning more frontline services and fair pay. As the NHS Confederation has demonstrated, if healthcare trusts meet their target to cut primary energy consumption by 15%, the NHS will save £50 million per year on its current energy bills – the equivalent of 7,000 heart by-pass operations.

Housing

As a union committed to public housing we note the enormous potential for homes to be better equipped in terms of energy efficiency, insulation and microgeneration. To such ends plans for eco towns and zero carbon homes are welcome developments. However, around 80% of the homes we will inhabit in 2050 are already standing today. And of the 17 million homes that have cavity walls, over half remain unfilled. Despite all the messages about living greener lifestyles, household emissions have risen over the last 10 years and now total 27% of our total emissions. Along with Friends of the Earth we believe that a low carbon strategy for all UK homes is essential if we are to tackle climate change. Such a strategy should include radically improved insulation and solar installations for all homes, minimum energy standards for homes and appliances and a wider reform of energy tariffs so that we are rewarded for using less and paid for anything we put in from microgeneration. It would also help

the fuel poor, create jobs and make our homes more comfortable.

Public services around the world

It is those in the developing world who will suffer first and more seriously as a consequence of climate change. As the World Health Organization has shown, climate change is already responsible for 150,000 deaths across the world each year, the vast majority of which occur in the developing world. To add insult to injury the deadly effects of climate change, including extreme weather conditions, changes in temperature and rainfall, which influence the transmission of many diseases and disrupt food production, are all felt most acutely by populations who have contributed the least to the problem of greenhouse gas emissions.

The public services of health, education, water and sanitation are already under severe pressure due to continued under-investment relative to need. More work needs to be done to establish how climate change is affecting these services in developing countries now – and what the future holds. Recent research by WaterAid does however indicate that higher temperatures will expand the range of some dangerous diseases such as malaria, and increase the likelihood of water borne diseases. With regard to water resources, rising global temperatures will intensify the hydrological cycle, resulting in drier dry seasons and wetter rainy seasons. This will increase the likelihood of more extreme and frequent floods and drought. All of this has far-reaching implications for water resource

management – both supply and sanitation. Climate change will also impact heavily on agriculture, which is as dependent on adequate water supply as people are.

As a union committed to public service, UNISON has always believed that the key essential services of health, education, water supply and sanitation should be in the public domain. We continue to believe that. Despite the incredibly significant challenges facing developing countries, water privatisation and the fragmentation of health service provision across numerous commercial and civil society providers are still being promoted by multilateral institutions. These include the World Bank, the European Union, the Global Fund, and indeed our own Department for International Development as well as some non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

UNISON must continue to ask whether companies working for profit and other providers working outside the public sector are really going to be able to respond effectively to the imminent and far-reaching challenges that climate change poses. UNISON believes that well resourced and managed publicly owned organisations, working for the public good, stand the best chance of rising to this challenge.

More work to identify the potential impact of climate change on essential services does however need to be undertaken. UNISON has already established working connections with NGOs such as Oxfam, the World Development Movement and WaterAid, and we will seek to work more closely with them and our sister unions in developing countries to take this work forward.

Public services and public sector unions worldwide are also significant contributors to carbon emissions and users of precious finite resources. UNISON will work through its international confederations such as the International Trade Union Confederation, the European Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, and through bilateral contact with sister unions, to both share our own learning and learn from similar initiatives established by other unions.

Engaging in policy debates and campaigns

UNISON has a responsibility to champion sustainability and international social justice and be prepared to engage in policy debates and campaigns to stand up for what it believes. Currently, the most important policy debates are around the government's climate change

bill (including questions about how it will be implemented), energy and transport. Our engagement in these areas reflects the decisions of UNISON's national delegate conference and, in relation to energy and transport, the experience and expertise of our members who work in these sectors. Further information about all of these policy areas can be found on our website.

In all of these areas our work is underpinned by the beliefs that: a) we need a just transition to a low carbon economy and b) fairness and social justice should inform all policies to tackle climate change in the UK and internationally. In other words, working people need social protection, training and new jobs to go to during the inevitable economic restructuring ahead, and any green taxes or other environmental incentives/disincentives should be designed according to progressive principles.



Policy into practice

Greening the workplace

Greening the workplace is the name we give to all the work that we do to improve the environment and reduce emissions where we work. The box, right, includes the first steps that members should take to green their workplace. The first five steps your branch takes are the most important. We can all play our part in helping to green the workplace, but these simple five steps will ensure we are taking a joined-up approach.

Five steps to greening your workplace

Step 1 Establish the state of play

- Does your branch have a member or some members who would be willing to champion environmental issues in the workplace?
- Does your branch already have an environmental policy, or any links to environmental campaign groups?
- Could your branch organise an event for interested members using UNISON's activity toolkit? (see www.unison.org.uk/green)
- Does your employer have a proactive approach to the environment? Do they have policies in place, or maybe an environmental management scheme (such as ISO 14001 or EMAS)?
- If you work for a local authority, has it signed up to the Nottingham Declaration (www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/housingbuildings/localauthorities/NottinghamDeclaration/)?

Step 2: Draw up an action plan

- Your branch should elect a trade union environmental representative or establish a small branch environmental action team to take forward the branch's priorities. Priorities might include:
 - getting green issues on the bargaining agenda
 - incentives for green staff travel, such as homeworking or push bike or season ticket loans
 - winning an agreement on a productivity related bonus scheme based on energy savings
 - better recycling facilities.

Step 3: Preliminary approach to your employer

The aim of the first approach to management should be to establish common concerns and to agree a joint approach to greening the workplace, such as joint union-employer green audits.

Step 4: Get a green agreement

The agreement should provide a framework for discussions with your employer and include clear objectives and procedures and, where possible, a commitment to facilities time and training.

Step 5: Follow-up

Inform members and prospective members about the agreement and to promote the positive actions they can take at work. Use the green message at recruitment events.



Organise and recruit around the green agenda

There is clearly a strong organisational component to this work. We should always look to recruit members who are interested in green issues, but who hadn't necessarily associated these with UNISON in the past. The more members we recruit, the stronger we are, the more sustainable our workplaces will be. Our environmental activity in the workplace and our active participation in high-profile campaigns such as Stop Climate Chaos should be prominent at recruitment days and induction events.

Campaigning for environmental goals

Water at work

In addition to the broad 'greening the workplace' campaign, stand alone workplace campaigns, such as 'water at work', have been established. UNISON launched the water at work campaign in conjunction with the water industry and water experts to improve the provision of mains-fed drinking water in workplaces.

The campaign aims to encourage as many employers as possible to provide staff with accessible mains-fed water on the shop floor or in the office.

Workers work better if they are hydrated and have access to good clean drinking water. Bottled water is no better than mains water, and the effect on the environment of water being transported around is enormous.

Medical evidence proves that hydrated workers are healthier, happier and more efficient. The first

signs of dehydration include loss of concentration, memory loss and even impaired hand-eye co-ordination.

Employers have a legal duty to provide their staff with drinking water in the workplace. But they often provide bottled water, which is expensive and has a high environmental impact. Where tap water is offered to employees, it is often from unsatisfactory sources, such as lavatories.

Further details can be found at: www.wateratwork.org

Stop Climate Chaos

Launched on 1 September 2005, Stop Climate Chaos aims to be the broadest and most diverse coalition yet established within the UK to campaign for changes to government policy on climate change. Its growing membership – which includes many of the UK's leading environmental organisations, international development agencies and other national campaigning bodies – aims to build public pressure on the UK government to act at home and abroad to prevent global warming as a result of exceeding the widely-accepted danger threshold of two degrees Celsius.

In October 2006, the coalition launched its 'I count' mass public campaign. This has inspired thousands of people to take action against climate change and is the coalition's prime vehicle for engaging the public.

Stop Climate Chaos and I count, will play a crucial role in the campaign to ensure that the climate change bill is robust enough to prevent serious climate change. It will also promote UK leadership at the forthcoming international talks on a

successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

Further details of how UNISON branches can play a role in the I count campaign can be found at: www.stopclimatechaos.org

Other useful websites

UNISON green pages
www.unison.org.uk/green

TUC environmental pages
www.sustainableworkplace.org.uk

Campaign Against Climate Change
www.campaigncc.org

Friends of the Earth
www.foe.co.uk

Greenpeace
www.greenpeace.org.uk

Sustran
– sustainable transport charity
www.sustrans.org.uk

Wateraid
www.wateraid.org/uk

World Development Movement
www.wdm.org.uk

World Wildlife Fund
www.wwf-uk.org/core/index.asp

Climate change is the challenge that will define our age. But what's it got to do with UNISON? This booklet sets out why we should care and why climate change and the environment are key issues in the workplace and across our public services. It includes tips and practical activities to get members and branches greening their workplace.

Photography: Phil Maxwell

