

**How to Stage a  
Car Free Day  
In Your Community**

**Sierra Club of Canada  
Eastern Canada Chapter**

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## **Foreward**

This “How to Stage a Car Free Day in your Community” guide has been created to give Canadians an understanding of the background behind the initiative and what steps you can take to host and benefit from a Car Free Day in your community.

Car Free Day (CFD) is an opportunity for Canadians to take personal, positive and constructive measures to reduce greenhouse gases in their community. To begin the process of establishing the link between the fossil-fueled car, the deteriorating quality of our air and the related health problems associated with them.

Car Free Day will also allow Canadians an opportunity to learn about, and raise awareness on, the issues of smog and air pollution – and their global counterparts – climate change and global warming. These issues are no longer limited to just large cities and urban areas. Recent studies have shown that the amount of smog in the cottage country of Ontario - 300 kilometres north of Toronto – is as bad or worse than in the city itself.

Car Free Day is not about just eliminating the use of your car for one day. It's about coming to understand the short and long-term effects of the continual use of the car. It's about looking into alternative options to the car – such as public transit, cycling, car-pooling, walking and telecommuting.

You will learn from this guide about the individuals and groups who are advocating alternatives and are taking action in their communities to reduce car dependency. In 2001, Toronto was part of a global initiative that included over a 1000 cities and 100 million people worldwide.

## **Background and History of Car Free Day**

Although the recent momentum behind the Car Free Day (CFD) movement in the last three or four years has raised awareness for the initiative, its roots extend back thirty to forty years. Its most recent growth has been fueled by the diligent work of French and Italian Ministries of Environment and Energy and the European Union's Environment Directorate.

On September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999, 66 French towns, 92 Italian towns and the canton of Geneva came together to coordinate the first Car Free Day. Based on the success of this day, the Italian Ministry of the Environment staged a series of four Car Free Days, taking place on the first Sunday of the month starting in February 2000. Each day would include a theme; music, culture, Earth Day activities and sports. At the same time, the City of Bogota in Colombia, staged its first Car Free Day on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The city of seven million people was closed to traffic and declared an unqualified success by local administrators. Bogota has declared the first Thursday of February as Car Free Day and has completed a second CFD in 2001.

Following the success of the European CFD in 1999, the European Union set up a two-year program, with a budget of two million dollars, to help European countries promote and stage Car Free Day throughout Europe. The results were impressive. 760 cities and towns, with over 70 million people in 26 European and non-EU countries participated in Car Free Day in 2000.

Toronto became the first Canadian and North American city to stage a official Car Free Day in September 2001. With backing from the City of Toronto, the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, Environment Canada and numerous private-sector sponsors, the Sierra Club of Canada – Eastern Canada Chapter brought Car Free Day to Canada (see [carfreeday.ca](http://carfreeday.ca) for details of the event). The European Commission now recognizes Canada as a full partner in the Car Free Day initiative. Worldwide in 2001, over 1000 cities and towns and more than 100 million people experienced Car Free Day.

Responding to this worldwide growth of Car Free Day, the European Union web-site ([www.22september.org](http://www.22september.org)) has recently renamed its web-site from European Car Free Day to International Car Free Day.

Car Free Day has arrived in Canada. The goal in the future is to expand the initiative to cities and towns across the country. To engage all levels of government, citizens and businesses in helping to tackle the issues of smog and air pollution and the related health problems associated with them.

Toronto may have been the first, but it shouldn't be the last Canadian city to stage Car Free Day. Help bring Car Free Day to you community.

## **Q & A's about Car Free Day**

### **Why is the day so important?**

We have so used to cars and trucks driving through the middle of our cities and towns that we have forgotten what we have lost. Our cities and towns are now noisier, dirtier and more dangerous than they used to be, but the changes have happened so gradually, that we have hardly been aware of them. A well-planned CFD will provide a practical demonstration of how quality can be improved in a town centre or other locations. The evidence is that whenever a CFD is held, those who experience it want one more often and across a wider area.

### **Why organize a one-day event?**

Air pollution and the problems with urban commuting are of concern to people today. Surveys continue to show that Canadians are concerned with the quality of air and the increasing congestion and traffic in our urban areas. The Car Free Day initiative is part of an approach aimed at reclaiming cities and towns from the fossil-fueled vehicle and represents an important chance for dialogue on the issue. It focuses on raising the awareness of urban dwellers with respect to nuisances caused by the use of private cars in the city (air pollution, noise etc.) It also stresses the rights of pedestrians and cyclists, the need for more and better public transit and helps people rediscover their local community from outside the confines of their vehicle. The idea behind Car Free Day is not to put the car on trial or totally condemn the users' desire for mobility, but to reconsider urban transport with the prospect of sharing streets more efficiently.

### **What does the event involve?**

Car Free Day is about the combination of having fun and using it as a great opportunity for learning. The range of activities that have taken place in other communities include arts and crafts markets, free bus services, children's play areas, cycle training and other cycle events, free zero emission delivery service, evening parties, restaurants and cafes extending out onto the pavements for the day, music, streets markets, street theatre, school walking bus etc. At the same time, innovative alternative transportation solutions have been presented. These include electric bikes, electric vehicles, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vehicles, dual powered vehicles and eco-friendly cars.

### **Why should your town take part?**

Various studies have shown that an attractive townscape improves the economic performance of a city. Town centres or areas with reduced motorized traffic are known to make cities more attractive. When successfully planned, a CFD event is a powerful tool to persuade local people that reducing motorized traffic leads to a better local environment and healthier local economy.

### **How to get your city or town involved?**

Read this guide, visit the web and read about other CFD activities taking place around the globe. Once you feel comfortable with some of the background, approach your local community leaders about hosting a CFD event. Fill then in on other CFD activities and let them know they are not alone. Once they have an understanding of the initiative and reasons behind it, they will see the benefits behind Car Free Day

### **How do you make a success of your participation in CFD?**

In essence it comes down to planning, consultation, inclusion and publicity. In addition to possible support from various levels of government, local champions and groups must be recruited to support the initiative. These could include local cycling groups, citizen groups, merchants associations, environmental non-governmental organizations etc. The lead group championing the event should begin consultations with all of these groups and come up with a strategy that came be used to win support for the day. Use the local media to help promote the initiative. Remember that Car Free Day is a “good news” story and that the media should promote it as such.

### **What is the future of Car Free Day?**

Car Free Day is here to stay and is set to expand. Our European partners are already discussing how to develop CFD's in future years. Possibilities include:

- Participating towns and cities should use CFD to inaugurate something permanent
- Changing the duration of the campaign – possibly to car free weekends
- Increase the frequency of the campaign – a late spring/early summer date to complement the September 22<sup>nd</sup> and bookend the smog season.

## **Planning a Car Free Day**

In this section, we will outline the various stages that will provide your community with the basic steps in staging a successful Car Free Day. While CFD is still a relatively new initiative, best practices and guidelines have developed that will optimize your community's Car Free Day. Use them as a guideline and remember to be flexible to the specific needs of your area. The goal behind Car Free Day is help educate the community on the issue and how we can pull together to solve the problem.

### **Preparation and Planning**

- There is a storehouse of information available on the web that will provide your group with background on CFD. The [www.carfreeday.ca](http://www.carfreeday.ca) site will give you background on Canada's first Car Free Day in Toronto and provide links to European Car Free Day organizations.
- Begin preparations for your event as soon as possible. The sooner you begin, the more time you will have to pull all the pieces together. A four to six month window should give you time to coordinate the activities. If you are running into delays in bureaucracy and funding, don't despair. Toronto's first Car Free Day was pulled together in seven weeks.
- In order to maximize the exposure of your CFD, pick a date that corresponds with other established CFD events in Canada and around the globe. This will allow you to market your event as part of an international movement. The two most established international CFD events are:
  - European Car Free Day – September 22<sup>nd</sup>  
The European Union has designated September 22<sup>nd</sup> as the official European Car Free Day. As mentioned earlier, there is some discussion of expanding the event to either car free weekends or designating May 22<sup>nd</sup> as another Car Free Day
  - Earth Car Free Day – April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002  
Earth Car Free Day ran for the first time in 2001 and is geared to run around Earth Day (April 22<sup>nd</sup> of every year). It is sponsored and coordinated by Earth Day Networks and Ecoplan International out of Paris.
- Planning your event early will give you time to coordinate activities and keep in touch with other groups on their plans. Remember discussion with other groups will continue to strengthen national and international ties.

### **Generating Ideas**

- The first step is to get started. Get together with various groups and potential partners in your community to begin the dialogue on Car Free Day. Local community officials, elected representatives, community groups and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO's) are all groups that can help and benefit from a CFD in their community. Set up meetings and brainstorm on what would work in your community.
- Once you have brought some of these groups on-side and the initiative is moving forward, enlist the aide of groups that would most benefit from the day. Local cycling groups and shops are a natural fit for helping promote CFD, but all groups should be encouraged to participate. CFD works best as a participatory event. Build a good network of contacts and share information and the workload.
- Consider a list of potential car free zones in your community, discuss the merits and downsides of each with all affected groups - including local community officials, community groups and any groups who might be affected by the event.
- Plan positive use of the car free space. The options are limitless and can include a children's area, arts and craft market, bicycle repair stations, musical acts and street theatre, restaurants and cafes extending out on to the sidewalk etc. The events are only limited by your imagination and the only rule is TO MAKE IT FUN!

### **Involve and consult**

- The eventual success of your Car Free Day will be determined by the number of people that become involved, so consult and involve as many groups as possible, especially with those most affected by the plans. Be prepared to modify initial plans in light of feedback and look out for potential partners among those sending in constructive feedback.
- While various levels of government may be prepared to become involved in helping to fund the event, look for local businesses to help with sponsorship. Local TV or radio stations plus community newspapers all can benefit and help promote Car Free Day. Remember CFD is a good news story and they will want to be part of it. Same for local businesses and art and community groups.
- Encourage people of all ages and groups to participate and comment and be witnesses to the occasion. Of vital importance is to get the local schools and children involved in the process. They're future is at stake and they are powerful allies in helping to change and shape the attitudes of older adults such as parents, grandparents and care-givers.
- Meet and bring on-side your local business and merchant associations. They're support is crucial in the planning and implementation of a CFD, as they are the organizations at "street level" who will be most affected. Stress to them that acceptance levels in Europe are now topping 60% in support of CFD's. Remind them that it is also easier for their customers to access their stores from the sidewalk instead of the road.

- Local elected officials, provincial MPP's and national MP's are all interested in events helping to promote the environment. Contact them and see if they will attend.
- Invite and include all party groups that want to be involved. CFD is not a time for partisan politics.

### **Media and publicity**

- Keep the local press informed of all developments for your Car Free Day. Good media coverage is crucial to the success of the event, as they are the medium that will be the most effective in getting the message out. Prepare media kits for selected reporters in your community. Prepare timely news releases as the day gets closer. Invite a local reporter to a planning meeting in hopes they will get the word out.
- In the context of your press material, always use caps for Car Free Day or its acronym CFD. This will highlight the significance of the event
- Plan a press conference for about a week to ten days before the event. This will begin the final public phase of the event. A local high-profile elected official can go a long way to championing your event. Hopefully this person has been on-side since day one. For them, it will be their time to shine and promote the event.
- In addition to local media, posters and flyers will help promote the event. You can design your own material – as Toronto did – or download material from the European Car Free Day site ([www.22september.org](http://www.22september.org)). All graphics can be downloaded and used freely by communities. Local businesses can help with sponsorships that will offset the cost of printing, usually in return for a place on the material.
- Develop a web-site. Contact local web designers and graphic artists in your community or area and come up with an idea for a site. Hosting companies are available in most communities and areas and a monthly or yearly rate can be obtained for as little as \$20 dollars a month. While not absolutely necessary, web sites are a great way to promote your Car Free Day event to local, national and international communities. By establishing relationships with other groups worldwide, you can link to each others web sites and become part of the worldwide CFD initiative.

### **Putting everything together for the day**

- Gather your volunteers and officials together at least two to three hours ahead of the planned beginning of the event. Make sure that all of your alternative route signage is in place for motorists and bus passengers. This should have been planned previously in the weeks leading up to the day. Check to make sure it is in place.
- Car Free Day is also about bringing the idea of alternate transportation ideas and plans to your community. Printed material and knowledgeable individuals

who can discuss these ideas should be on site. Look at your city or town and see if permanent car free zones could be established. Walking school bus programs, new cycle routes, town centre pedestrianisation zones are all ideas that can be put forward to promote alternative transportation methods.

- Work with your local transport provider by promoting Car Free Day on their vehicles, giving away prizes and encouraging CFD special fares for the day. CFD should be of direct interest to them as the increased use of public transit is one of the keys behind the CFD initiative.
- Leaflets, posters and banners are useful for participants and passers-by explaining the event and its purpose. Volunteers and officials should be knowledgeable and briefed about all aspects of the initiative.
- A Car Free Day t-shirt for road stewards and volunteers are useful and act as highly visible “badges”
- Coordinate activities in the CFD area so that the event is perceived as a day of positive interaction. A local performer, personality or high-profile environmentalist “hosting” the day will help give a higher media presence.
- Encourage local cycling groups to help with deliveries within the car free area. It will be good publicity for them and for cycling and at the same time reinforce with merchants that they can receive their goods and produce without trucks and cars. (This is only for perishable goods that are time sensitive. Try to arrange for all other deliveries ahead of time).
- In order to record the event, work or commission a local video of your event. A local media/film study unit at a local school or college could provide invaluable experience for students.

### **Post Car Free Day Activities**

- Be patient with your first CFD. There are lessons to be learned and everything you want from the first CFD may not be possible. Better a small success with strong support from the community, than a radical statement that fails to meet expectations and jeopardizes future activities.
- After the day is completed, begin the process of consulting with all groups on the results of the day. What went right...what went wrong...what changes do we make...and when do we prepare for the next one.

## **Car Free Day Sites**

This Car Free Day Guide and Canada's first Car Free Day in Toronto would not have been possible without the diligent work of organizations from around the world. Their support has been invaluable and their cooperation unending. While we cannot acknowledge all of their efforts, we present a short list of Car Free Day advocates from around the world.

- European Car Free Day web site – [www.22september.org](http://www.22september.org)
- The Commons, Ecoplan and World Car Free Day site – [www.ecoplan.org](http://www.ecoplan.org)
- Car Free Times – [www.carfree.com](http://www.carfree.com)
- Great Britain Car Free Day site – [www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk)

## **Sierra Club of Canada**

The Car Free Day initiative in Canada could not have taken place without the hard-working and committed individuals who work and volunteer for the Sierra Club of Canada. Their tireless effort in promoting environmental initiatives in Canada and around the world are an inspiration to all of us. Special thanks to the Eastern Canada Chapter based in Toronto, who pulled together Canada's first Car Free Day in seven weeks and gave Canada and North America a template for future CFD's.

- Sierra Club of Canada – [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)
- Eastern Canada Chapter – <http://eastern.sierraclub.ca>

