

1. What IS this 10% Challenge?

It's a spirited community campaign to save energy and build leadership through a two-part challenge. (1) Cut your energy use 10% - and of course get the rest from the cleanest possible source. (2) Get 10% of your people involved - in household, business, government and institutional actions, and in spreading the word.

2. Why 10%? What's the magic in the number?

10% is a "stretch" goal but achievable. It's chosen to help communities wake up regarding climate change and energy security. The scientific community is urging carbon reductions on the order of 80%, so this is the low-hanging fruit. When we started, in 2010, the number had symbolism. Now it's just an easy measure.

3. How does a community go about this?

You start by making a commitment (through a resolution) and getting organized (with a committee larger than you think you need). You make the best possible measurement of current energy use and target the improvements that make most sense in your situation. They'll include changes at the household level - in lifestyle, hardware and appliances. They'll also include communitywide initiatives like upgrades in street lights, bicycle pathways, water-efficiency and so on. You look for actions that will save energy, involve people, save money and improve quality of life.

4. Is this just about the government's energy use, or everyone's?

Everyone's.

5. How is this different from other programs that come from the state agencies, utilities, and nonprofits to help communities go green?

The 10% Challenge fits right in with the resource saving programs from the utilities and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, the Climate Smart Communities Pledge from the DEC, and the five-milestone process from ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability used by some cities. Many of these are organized around multi-year goals. The 10% Challenge is a "turbo-charge," encouraging quicker mobilization and more ambitious planning. It's based on the notion that change is easier, when undertaken sooner, before things get worse in the environment and economy. It's also based on a unique psychology. While we try to make the effort as easy and convenient as possible, we also aim to get people excited so that they are willing to stretch for the goal. We want change in attitudes as well as behavior.

6. How do you do that?

There's the experiment. So far, we've created prizes that have enticed a dozen communities to participate. They are a solar thermal system from EarthKind Energy, a sail on the Clearwater for the winning community's schools, a day of rest and renewal at Omega Institute for the winning community's council or board, and a solar opportunity assessment for the entire community from The Solar Energy Consortium.

We've also launched campaigns with fun events such as a 10K road race and a block party.... gotten restaurants to give specials for people bringing in their personal energy saving plans.... encouraged libraries to lend out "Kill a Watt" meters so people can see where their energy drains are... worked with the utilities and NYSERDA to offer incentives, rebates and easy assistance.... done contests and work parties..for starters. After the pilot phase, done with Red Hook and Warwick, five additional municipalities have signed on, so we're doing something right.

7. Who else is involved?

Right now it's the Town and Village of Red Hook, Village of Tivoli, Town of Warwick, Villages of Warwick, Florida and Greenwood Lake, Villages of Montgomery, Walden and Maybrook, City of Watervliet, and Village of Wappingers Falls. And our sponsors, volunteers, and key partners such as Mid-Hudson EnergySmart Communities.

8. Isn't it expensive to make these changes?

We're talking about some opportunities for savings at no cost, by using resources more carefully. It doesn't cost money to turn off appliances when they're not in use, or to combine trips to use less gas. The next level of change is investing in more efficient hardware and tightening up our buildings; there, the trick is to do one thing at a time and pay for the the next out of savings on your energy bills.

9. How do we spread the word?

Start with word of mouth, enthusiastically. The papers and radio stations have been very receptive all around the Valley. Social media like Facebook and Green Guru Network also help. And the institutions of our community - the Chambers, libraries, gyms and so on - they're all channels of communication. Use your creativity.

10. Why would anyone be interested? Why not? Seriously, a few of the reasons people are participating include saving money, concern about foreign oil dependence, environmental concerns about coal and natural gas, interest in green jobs, the campaign's value in teaching science and civics, and good old political photo-ops!

My community hasn't signed onto the 10% Challenge yet. How do I get them on board?

10% Challenge: Frequently Asked Questions

Tell them about it. Project enthusiasm. And bring a representative from Sustainable Hudson Valley to explain how it works.