



**City
of
Milwaukee**

*INTERDEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE
LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU*

Memorandum

To: Ald. Tony Zielinski
From: Rich Watt, Legislative Fiscal Analyst
Date: April 28, 2009
Re: **Earth Hour**

You requested information relating to the annual observance of Earth Hour and a look at how Milwaukee could participate in the future. Please find below responses to these questions.

Background

Earth Hour is a global event organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). It is held the last Saturday of March each year. The event asks businesses and households to turn off all non-essential electrical lights and appliances for one hour in an effort to raise awareness towards the need to take action on climate change.

History

Earth Hour was first established in Sydney, Australia, in 2007, during which approximately 2.2 million homes and businesses shut off or dimmed their lights. The consumption was 2% lower than would normally be expected for that time and date. As the first Earth Hour was promoted as having the potential to greatly reduce energy consumption, it generated some criticism for not producing any real results. Organizers of the event for 2008 and 2009 adjusted the stated goals of Earth Hour and presented it not as an effort to reduce energy consumption for that hour, but as a symbolic action by cities around the world. In 2009, the event goals were further refined as counting each dimmed or extinguished light as a vote for conservation, and against global warming.

The 2009 Earth Hour was observed by more than 4,000 cities and towns in 88 countries worldwide. The event occurred on March 28, 2009 at 8:30 pm local time and lasted one hour. The stated goal for the 2009 event was one billion "votes" for energy conservation as a strong message of support to world leaders meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2009 for a summit on climate change.

Local Observance of Earth Hour

Several Milwaukee residents and organizations participated in the 2009 Earth Hour. The event did not receive a high level of publicity locally, though it was the subject of an OnMilwaukee.com article the day of the event. Local governments throughout the world have participated in Earth Hour in varying degrees. The most common action for a local government's participation is simply extinguishing lights on city-owned buildings, especially landmark buildings such as Milwaukee's City Hall. As the event is mostly symbolic, most municipalities choose not to dim street lights or other essential lighting. Public awareness of the event is suggested to prevent a repeat of the embarrassment Calgary, Canada experienced during the 2008 Earth Hour when power consumption actually rose for the hour. The public awareness is sometimes directed through the municipality or through cooperation with local groups.

Please contact me at ext. 2253 if you would like further information on any of these points.

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RTW
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