



City prepares for 'voluntary blackout'

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As Thursday marks the fifth anniversary of the blackout that left some 50 million Canadians and Americans in the dark, the City of Cambridge is preparing for a "voluntary blackout".

On Aug. 14, 2003, 10 million Ontarians lost power as the result of a major power disruption. In some areas the outage lasted three days; it was the largest scale blackout in North American history. About 40 million people lost power to homes in the northeastern United States.

Financially speaking, losses that resulted from the outage totalled about \$6 billion. It was later determined by officials that a power generation plant in Ohio was where the problem originated.

"We become so used to electricity and light that it's such a shock," said Mayor Doug Craig, who remembers being at home when the lights went out.

Hespeler was the first area in Cambridge to have power restored, noted the mayor.

In a similar fashion to Earth Hour, which was demonstrated by thousands worldwide in March, the city will switch off all the lights and power sources it can in municipal buildings in an effort to cut energy usage.

Air conditioning units and compressors for facilities will be switched off.

The mayor was quick to remind that the new City Hall was designed to save on energy usage all the time. The new design has cut energy consumption at City Hall by 40 per cent, noted Craig.

"...we are leaders in the nation in terms of being eco-friendly," he added.

About 75 per cent of the building is exposed to sunlight, and so, while there are lights in every room, natural light can often act as a first option.

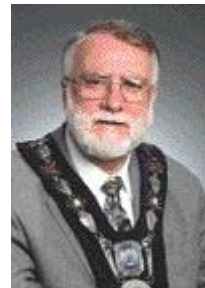
While Craig said many people take for granted everyday amenities, he also said the blackout experience opened a lot of eyes.

"People want to be part of the solution," he said.

Blue boxes are a perfect example, said Craig, of an environmentally-friendly initiative that caught on quickly with Cambridge residents. Every little bit really can help.



Mayor Doug Craig said the blackout experience opened a lot of eyes - including City Hall.



Mayor Doug Craig

The blackout encouraged people to "start, in a major way, to conserve in a much more aggressive manner."

Anyone can participate in the voluntary blackout at home on Thursday. The Blackout Day Group - a not-for-profit incorporation based in Mississauga, Ont. - formed after the massive outage and, on its website, offers blackout party ideas, along with conservation tips. People can register online; nearly 500 individuals were signed up as of yesterday, along with 33 municipalities and six businesses.

For more information, visit www.blackoutday.ca.

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