




GROWING GREENER TOGETHER

KEEP ME

Your Guide To Living In Balance With Nature

Okotoks
Historic Past. Sustainable Future.

okotoks.ca



“We have the world
to live in on the
condition that we
will take good care
of it. And to take
good care of it,
we have to know it.
And to know it
and to be willing
to take care of it,
we have to love it.”

- Wendell Berry - Novelist

Photo By Jenni Bailey



When you are finished with me, please pass me along to a neighbour or friend, or recycle me!

The purpose of this Growing Greener Together guide is to help our community live in balance with nature.

Use this guide to learn how your local actions, big and small, can positively impact your neighbours, the river, our community and our planet. Find practical tools, resources and tips to assist you, while also discovering cost-saving ideas.



*It can be easy to green your everyday life!
Start with the small stuff, get everyone involved and make it a family affair!*

Thank You for all you do to help Okotoks continually improve our efforts to be an environmentally responsible community.

Find accurate and current information on programs, services, events and resources from the Town of Okotoks:

www.okotoks.ca    @TownofOkotoks



The value of YOUR water

Drink Tap Water and Save Money

Fact: One cubic meter (1000 Litres), of tap water costs under \$2, while just 1 Litre of bottled water costs around \$1! The same amount of bottled water would cost approximately \$1,000!

Tap water flows so freely that we sometimes forget there is a direct cost to treat and pump this valuable resource to and from our homes and businesses.

Every drop of water that comes from your tap takes an amazing journey. From streams and rivers to aquifers below ground, water goes through a series of pumps, filters, pipes, and tanks until it's safe to drink. Using a few simple water conservation strategies can cut back on common water guzzlers and add up to small and big savings.

Kitchen Tips

- ✓ Use the fridge to keep drinking water cold
- ✓ Water plants with leftover water from your drinking cups
- ✓ Use your green organics cart instead of a garburator for food waste

Bathroom Tips

- ✓ Take the leaky toilet test: drop food colouring in your toilet tank, wait at least 10 minutes, check the bowl for change in water colour
- ✓ Save over 30,000L of water/year - install WaterSense® fixtures



Monitor your water use and catch leaks early

Have a sneaking suspicion someone in your house is taking excessively long showers or the toilet has a leak? Wonder how much that dripping faucet is costing you?


Find out! Sign up online for access to your Water Meter Portal account where you can see your average hourly, daily or monthly water usage, and set your own alerts.

www.okotoks.ca/WaterMeter

Did you know?

- ◆ Water and energy are closely linked - it takes a lot of energy at many stages to clean and move water through our community, to our taps, and then back to the river.
- ◆ Toilets, humidifiers, water softeners and washing appliances are the cause of most leaks.
- ◆ Potable water is safe to drink – it's the high-quality water from your tap.
- ◆ According to the Government of Canada both tap and bottled water have the same quality standards. Some bottled water is just municipal tap water! It takes 3 Litres of water to produce 1 Litre of bottle water.

**What if you detect a water leak?
Call 403-938-1230 for a water meter
check and leak detection assistance.**



our water, the wildlife, our neighbours – it's all connected

The deer, fish, ducks, and other aquatic wildlife who share our river depend on us to protect the Sheep River and keep it clean; as do our neighbours downstream who rely on the river for their drinking water supply.




How you care for your wastewater can have a big impact on protecting the river for all those who depend on it.

Every time you flush the toilet, take a shower or wash the dishes, you send wastewater down the drain, which is treated and released back into the Sheep River.

Our treatment plant isn't designed to remove chemicals, medicines or hazardous household waste, and these items end up flowing into our river and harming aquatic life.


What you put down the drain matters! Avoid discarding these items at home to not only help protect our water and our wild friends, but to also prevent costly backups or damage to your own pipes.

| ITEM | WHAT'S THE HARM? | WHERE TO PROPERLY DISPOSE |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Medicine | Ends up in our river | Drop off: pharmacy |
| Nail polish & remover | Ends up in our river | Drop off: Okotoks Eco Centre |
| Lotions and perfumes | Ends up in our river | Black garbage cart |
| Baby or cleaning wipes, disposable diapers, cotton swabs, feminine hygiene products, condoms | Never flush; can clog sewer pipes | Black garbage cart |
| Cooking fat, oil, grease, hair | Can clog your pipes | Green organics cart (once it sets) |
| Dental floss | Can wrap around backflow valve and result in raw sewage backing up into your home | Black garbage cart |
| Paint, solvents, polish, glue | Ends up in our river | Drop off: Okotoks Eco Centre |



fat-berg: Found in the sewer system, this is a very large congealed lump of fat, personal hygiene products, wet wipes and other similar items that have been flushed down toilets.

*** One of the world's largest fatbergs was found in Liverpool, England and weighed 400 tonnes. That's the same weight as 196 minivans!**



our water, the wildlife,
our neighbours
– it's all connected



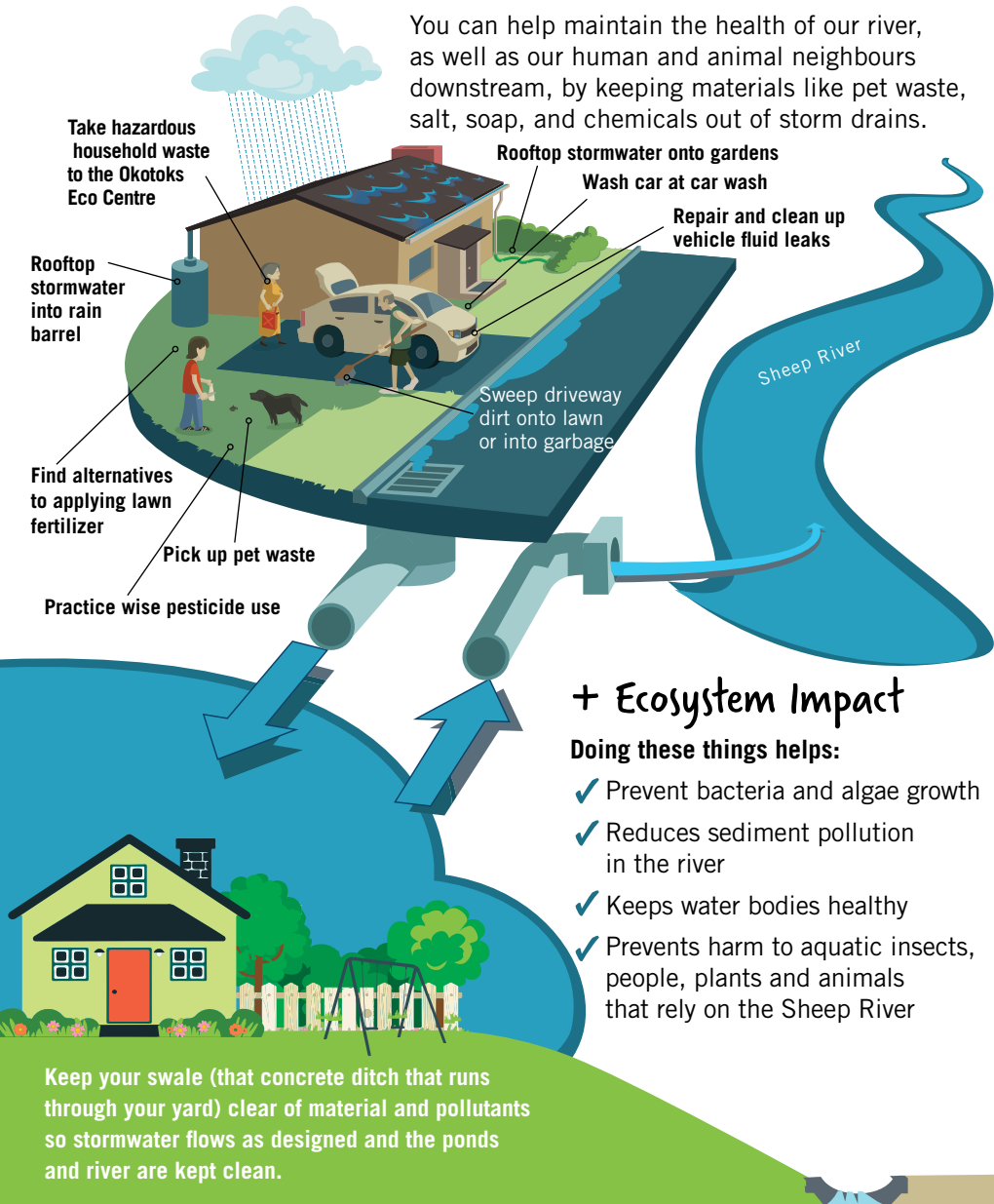
Water that flows from concrete swales, along residential properties, and down storm drains does not go to the treatment plant.

Water either enters the river directly or flows to a stormwater pond prior to entering the Sheep River.



'Freeing' goldfish and aquatic pets (dead or alive) in any body of water can harm our river's ecosystem (and it's illegal!). Bring unwanted live pets to pet stores or animal shelters. See more on invasive species in the "Your Yard and its Connection to Nature" section.

You can help maintain the health of our river, as well as our human and animal neighbours downstream, by keeping materials like pet waste, salt, soap, and chemicals out of storm drains.



Protecting our water supply for today and for future generations



How can you have a yard that is the envy of your neighbours and requires less watering, weeding and fertilizing? Follow these tips, and you'll have more time to enjoy your yard and the extra savings on your water bill.

Garden

- ✓ Replace grass with drought-tolerant plants
- ✓ Use rain barrels or install a rain harvesting system
- ✓ Add 2 inches of mulch in gardens to retain water
- ✓ Hand water in the early morning and evening to avoid evaporation
- ✓ Group garden plants with similar watering needs together

Lawn and Yard

- ✓ Healthy lawns require just 1 inch of water per week
- ✓ Invest in a water gauge to track how much water your lawn gets each week
- ✓ Use a sprinkler timer to avoid overwatering
- ✓ Water less often to create strong, deep grass roots
- ✓ Sweep paved areas instead of using the water hose
- ✓ 12" of top soil is best for growing healthy lawns (and gardens too!)

Did you know?


- The Town uses a user-pay model for water. The charges for water on your utility bill are consumption-based (with 3 tiers), with the remaining being a flat delivery rate.
- This means residents using less than average amounts of water will pay less and those with higher than average water use will pay a premium rate for above-average consumption.
- Did you know the Town offers an annual Water Conservation Rebate Program? www.okotoks.ca/Water-Rebate

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead – Anthropologist

Love Your Grass?

You can still conserve water in a few ways!

- 
- ← **Keep your lawn at least 3 inches high**
 - ← **Plant drought-tolerant grasses**
 - ← **Healthy soil: leave your grass clippings on the lawn to return nutrients to the soil!**
 - ← **Healthy roots: less water results in stronger roots - your grass only needs 1 inch of water/week**



A tool to help balance community supply and demand




We are committed to conserving and protecting our precious water supply. Managing our water resources wisely is important so our community can rely on our water system for many years to come. We rely on you and all our local residents and businesses to help practice responsible water use.



The outdoor water schedule is one of the primary tools that many municipalities across Canada use to help manage water supply.

Why do we have an outdoor watering schedule?

- ✓ It's part of our community commitment to practice responsible water use.
- ✓ Our community's demand for water typically increases by 30% during the summer months when the Sheep River basin provides the least resources.
- ✓ Our licensed water supply is sufficient to meet our community's needs. But during the summer season when we experience consecutive hot days, the Town's water supply system (wells and reservoirs) are challenged to keep up with the high demands. This stresses our water system. The outdoor watering schedule functions to keep water reserves at the best levels to serve residents.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| |  | General Outdoor Use <small>(except automated irrigation)</small> | Automated Irrigation Only |
| SUN & THURS | ODD Numbered Addresses | 6 AM-9 AM OR 7 PM-10 PM |  2 AM-5 AM |
| WED & SAT | EVEN Numbered Addresses | 6 AM-9 AM OR 7 PM-10 PM |  2 AM-5 AM |

Did you know?

- Hand watering vegetable and flower gardens with a watering container or hose can be done at any time.
- When no watering restrictions are in place, feel free to fill kiddie pools and run sprinklers for the kids anytime! Please just remember to turn off the sprinkler as soon as they're done. Don't forget you can also visit the Water Spray Park, open everyday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., when the temperature is above 20°C—it's always free and you won't have to run your water at all!
- The Town has four outdoor watering levels. The first level (green) is our regular watering schedule, which follows responsible water use practices. The others become increasingly cautious, depending on the current river and reservoir levels. This helps to ensure we have enough water for indoor household use and fire suppression during the dry summer months.
- Water shortages can happen any time, and can be planned or unplanned. Water restrictions can occur for a number of reasons including droughts, water pipeline or facility construction, unexpected emergencies like a water pipe break or upstream water quality issues.

**Have NEW SOD
or growing from
SEED?**

Apply for a Water Exemption Permit
www.okotoks.ca/water-permit






Keeping our air clean for now and future generations

**Air gives us life.
You can help keep it clean and our
neighbourhoods healthy – go idle-free.**

It's easy to lose track of time while letting your car warm up on a cold day or waiting to pick up a friend. But getting into the habit of turning off your car is a small, easy change that can make a big difference to your pocketbook and the planet!



**Reduce warm-up idling to
60 seconds before driving
away. But don't forget to
scrape your windows first
when it's cold out!**

Did you know Okotoks is idle-free?

We have a bylaw (18-15) to prevent excessive idling. It balances efforts to keep our air clean and reduce health problems while also considering safety and our local climate. Of course, allowances are in place to protect our furry friends, babies on board, and for extreme hot or cold temperatures.

Situation/Circumstance

Temp

Max Idle Time Allowed (per 30 minutes)

Occupied car



5 to 25°C outside



3 minutes

Below 5°C outside



No restrictions

Over 25°C outside



No restrictions

Unoccupied car



Over 0°C outside



3 minutes

Below 0°C outside



10 minutes

— Exceptions —



Indefinite Idling Allowed

pets (furry friends) or children in a car (babies on board), mechanical issues, medical conditions, and emergency vehicles

Keep our kids healthy!

Turning your car off while parked in a school zone can radically reduce children's exposure to toxic pollutants. Think about it – kids' lungs are still developing and they are physically closer to tail pipes!



Put waste
in its place

Waste is part of our everyday experience. Your help in properly sorting materials can go a long way in helping us give waste a new life and protecting the life of our landfill not only for our children, but also our children's children.



Organic Waste

Did you know food isn't garbage? Your green cart is the biggest opportunity you have to reduce the amount of waste you send to the landfill – nearly half of what we throw away is compostable. All food, pet and yard waste can go in your green cart, including many materials that can't be used for backyard composting.

Here are a few no-fuss, no-mess tips to make composting a little less smelly!

- ✓ Use certified compostable bags, or line your kitchen catcher with newspaper or paper towel to absorb moisture
- ✓ Freeze smelly meat scraps until collection day
- ✓ Rinse your kitchen catcher frequently; sprinkle baking soda in the bottom
- ✓ Bag pet waste in a certified compostable bag before placing it in your green cart

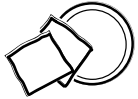
Did you know?



Your organic waste stays local! It's turned into compost at an Alberta facility and is then used around our province for local gardens and farms.



Biodegradable and compostable are not the same thing! Biodegradable bags don't decompose – they are made with plastic, or other non-compostable materials, that just break down into smaller pieces. Compostable bags are made from food by-products like corn starch and will decompose into compost.



Food-soiled paper, napkins and paper plates go in your green organics cart!

Recycling Waste

Recycling reduces the use of raw materials, but we also know it has a negative environmental impact and represents the largest volume of household waste. First, try to reduce how much you purchase and reuse what you have. As a last resort recycle. Here are just a few tips to help you with proper disposal:

- ✓ Put shredded paper in a clear bag
- ✓ After washing dishes, use the dirty dishwasher to rinse the inside of recyclable food containers!
- ✓ Stop recycling from becoming garbage! Clean out food containers before recycling so that they don't contaminate paper products.

NEED CART REPAIRS?

Submit your request for a repair or replacement through our easy online form:

www.okotoks.ca/Waste

Did you know?



Styrofoam™ cups and containers will survive in the landfill for over 500 years!



Renovation and construction waste are NOT collected at the curb. Self-haul wood, lumber, drywall, bricks, cabinetry, siding, windows etc. to the landfill.



Plastics you recycle are separated at a recycling facility, washed, chipped, pelletized and sold to make new products!



ECO CENTRE
400
1118 NORTH RAILWAY ST.

A community waste resource



Not everything can be placed in your blue cart, but all recyclables deserve a second chance. Many items that aren't collected at your curb can still be recycled at the Okotoks Eco Centre.



Centre Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday, 9 AM - 5 PM



While you're at the Eco Centre, pop by for a visit next door. Our Environmental Education Centre is open Monday to Friday, 8 AM to 4 PM and offers a visual exploration of Okotoks' water system.

Join us for family-friendly activities on Nature Fridays to help us connect with nature through crafts, reading, outdoor exploration, videos and more.

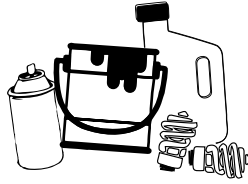
It's free, educational and there's a different theme each week!

www.okotoks.ca/Ed-Centre

The Eco Centre is a convenient solution for when your blue cart is full or when bulky items won't fit in your cart. Stop in to chat with the friendly staff, grab a free book from reader's corner, and drop off your extra recycling items!

Accepted items

- ✓ Alkaline & rechargeable batteries
- ✓ Car batteries
- ✓ Clothing, footwear, and household linens
- ✓ Electronics
- ✓ Empty motor oil containers
- ✓ Compact florescent light bulbs
- ✓ Paint & aerosol paints
- ✓ Styrofoam (polystyrene) packaging material
- ✓ Printer & toner cartridges
- ✓ Single-use coffee pods (i.e. Keurig K-cups)
- ✓ Spray triggers & pumps from cleaning bottles



What else can you bring to the Eco-Centre?

- ✓ Plastics (#1-7 – excluding Styrofoam food containers)
- ✓ Paper and corrugated cardboard
- ✓ Glass (clean/label removed)
- ✓ Metal (cans, tin foil, jar lids)

Did you know?

The **Foothills Salvage Centre** takes building materials, flooring, sinks, electronics in working order, and clean household items. Use the Waste Wizard or visit www.fsrsonline.com for a full list of items.

Mobile App and Waste Wizard



Find out what goes where with our Waste Wizard! Use the app to learn how to properly dispose of hundreds of items.

You can also sign up for free text, phone, email or calendar reminders for your waste, recycling & organics collection days. You'll also receive alerts when your collection is delayed. www.okotoks.ca/WasteWizard

Understanding plants and pollinators

Why are pollinators important?
Pollinated plants provide us
with a third of our food!



Be on the lookout for these pollinators native to Okotoks and learn how you can help them flourish:

Pollinator

Solitary Bees, Bumble Bees

How can you help?

Plant flowers that bloom through spring and summer

Butterflies and Moths

Plant bell-like flowers and colourful flowers

Hummingbirds

Plant tube/bell shaped flowers

Other ways you can help pollinators:

- ✓ Reduce (or avoid) insecticide or pesticide use as these deter necessary pollinators from making your yard home!
- ✓ Plant a variety of native plants that flower all summer long to provide a food source in your yard
- ✓ Keep wood and leaf or garden litter in your yard over winter (until late spring) - pollinators lay eggs and shelter here





Fun Bee Facts

- Alberta is home to over 300 native bee species (including the bumble bee), the majority of which are non-hive forming, solitary bees!
- Honey bees (social/hive-forming) are not native to North America
- Bees rarely sting unless provoked
- Have a beehive in your yard or somewhere else it shouldn't be? Contact the Chinook Honey Company for guidance at 403-995-0830!

Wildlife Tips



- ✓ See a hare leave it there – often baby bunnies appear to be on their own, but momma is never too far away. Touching them will actually cause their mother to abandon them.
- ✓ Call a pest control company if you have (but don't want) a skunk, vole, or other small pest living in your yard.
- ✓ Call Alberta Fish and Wildlife (403-652-8330) if you spot a cougar, bear, or other large animal inside town boundaries.
- ✓ To reduce your chances of deer conflict never feed deer; give deer their space when encountered and keep pets on a leash at all times.

Noxious weeds & Invasive species

Invasive plants have arrived, often accidentally, from somewhere else. They aren't native to our area and have no natural predators. This allows them to spread, crowd out and often harm or devastate native plants, natural spaces, and wildlife. Visit www.abinvasives.ca for a complete list of invasive plant species for our area.

Don't be fooled by their beauty! Check your yard for these sneaky plants, bag and dispose of them in your garbage (avoid composting to avoid spread).

- ✓ Guard your garden! Use deer-resistant plants to avoid feeding wildlife, minimize human-deer interactions, and keep your yard looking great. Check out the Water Conservation Rebate program's drought-tolerant plant list. www.okotoks.ca/water-rebate
- ✓ Stop to smell the flowers, but don't touch! Picking wildflowers prevents the plant from reproducing!

Forage for your own food!

Check out food forest areas right here in Okotoks
www.okotoks.ca/fruitpicking



Rethinking YOUR energy use



Energy keeps our homes warm and lit, our water hot, and our vehicles moving. The big question is – how can energy be used efficiently and have a smaller negative impact on the one home we have – earth. Being more efficient with the way we consume energy is one of the most effective ways to lower our carbon footprint.

Here are a few simple energy saving tips to get you started on making everyday changes that can help the planet and your pocketbook:

- Change your light-bulbs to LEDs
- Only wash full loads of dishes and clothing
- Hang clothes to dry outdoors
- Use a programmable thermostat
- Turn off electronics and lights when not in use
- Use the cold water option for washing clothes
- Add insulation to your attic
- Take advantage of the 94km of pathways to travel around town by foot or bike

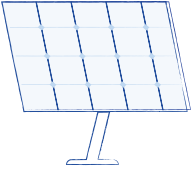


Residential alternative ENERGY options

Green your utilities: Consider switching some, or all, of your energy consumption to green energy, typically wind and hydro, with your utility company.

Interested in adding solar or energy-efficient retrofits to your home? Increasing your home's energy efficiency saves money on utility bills and decreases the amount of energy needed to keep you comfortable.

What can you do?



- ✓ Increase your home's insulation and air tightness to reduce heat loss on cooler days.
- ✓ Use lighter siding and roofing colours; minimize paved areas on your lot to keep your home cooler.
- ✓ Funding for energy retrofits is available through the Canada Greener Homes program (current as of 2022). www.nrcan.gc.ca

Did you know?

- ⚡ The Town lends out DIY home energy audit kits and a radon monitor for free for a week at a time. Book one today! www.okotoks.ca/EnergyKit
- ⚡ Electric vehicles can be cheaper to maintain; no oil, no gas, no fluid changes or timing belt replacements!
- ⚡ Okotoks has several EV charging stations around town. You can find them at www.okotoks.ca/EVcharging



Caring about future climate conditions



Okotoks resides in a semi-arid region. Over the next 30 years, climate change projections indicate a warmer and drier climate for our Town, resulting in increased drought events in the summer and precipitation in the winter, changes in temperature, and extreme weather events.

The Climate Action Plan provides guidance to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and also adapt to the effects of a climate that is already changing. As these changes continue to occur, the impacts on municipal infrastructure and services, private property, the local economy, the environment and the well-being of citizens will be numerous and diverse.

This plan identifies opportunities to protect all the things and people we care about and prepare for an uncertain future. Ultimately, it will ensure our community continues to prosper as a desirable place to live and work for generations to come. The Resilient Okotoks: Climate Action Plan provides our community with actions to build a better future, while learning from the past and adapting to the present situation and events as they occur.

The Climate Action Plan prioritizes acting on areas of vulnerability for:



Drought

River flooding



Water supply shortage



The Climate Action Plan identifies short term actions to protect homes and businesses from extreme weather events such as:

- ✓ Energy Efficient retrofits
- ✓ Weather-resilient buildings
- ✓ Alternative, inclusive forms of transportation
- ✓ Ongoing emergency response planning for extreme situations
- ✓ Flood mitigation infrastructure such as rock berms and vegetation along the river
- ✓ A notification system for emergencies – Alberta Emergency Alert
- ✓ Development of a water shortage management plan

What can you do to help prepare and keep your family safe?

- ✓ Put together a 72-hour kit – learn more at www.okotoks.ca/Safety
- ✓ Sign up for Alberta Emergency Alerts at www.okotoks.ca/AEA



How we live impacts how resources are used around the globe. Check out www.footprintcalculator.org to assess your environmental footprint.

If we continue on our current trajectory, in 30 years Okotoks' growing season will be similar to Lethbridge's current season. The average annual temperature will be 6.5° hotter, and it will be 6% drier in summer and 23% wetter in winter than conditions we experience today.

Semi-arid regions receive 25-51cm of annual precipitation



Find more details on the Okotoks Climate Action Plan at www.okotoks.ca/Climate-Action.



The power of the consumer – knowing your labels

There are so many environmental (green) labels and logos on products it can be confusing, overwhelming, and misleading.

Use this verified list to help decipher what the label is indicating about a product's environmental friendliness, and help you trust the products you are purchasing.

Certified



Corporation

Certified businesses meet social and environmental performance standards



Products meet Canadian standard for organic production and contain 95% organic ingredients.



Certifies organic agricultural products



Product must meet life cycle-based standards (supply chain management, positive social and environmental attributes)



Identifies products, new homes, buildings and industrial facilities that are certified to use less energy.



Offers farmers/workers fair prices for product while improving quality of life and reducing poverty.



Forest Stewardship Council: Wood must come from a well-managed forest (environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable).



Indicates reductions in total environmental footprint of entire product life-cycle.



Product is verified as a non-GMO (genetically modified organism) food source.



Look for the Ocean Wise symbol as an assurance of an ocean-friendly seafood choice. Recommended seafood options include wild and farmed/cultivated species that are caught or raised in ways that ensure the long-term health of species and their surrounding environment for generations to come.



Product ingredients are from farms held to high environmental and social standards.



Certification of a product is based on sustainable forest management (legal and responsible sources) that includes measures to protect the ecosystem.



Product is water-efficient as it uses at least 20% less water, and saves energy.

Honest Labels?

When the “green” claims about a product are untrue, it’s called greenwashing.

Greenwashing: the use of marketing by an organization that promotes a product or policy as environmentally friendly when it is not.

For Example



A bag might be promoted as biodegradable and environmentally friendly; but, it biodegrades into micro-plastic that harms the environment.

Choose a compostable bag instead, or simply bring your own reusable bag!

What we love most about Okotoks is our river valley, the natural spaces we share with our animal neighbours, and the vitality that being in natural spaces brings into our lives. Okotokians love nature!

We asked you "Why should we protect Okotoks' environment?" and you said...

"So we can have a good future and fresh air."

"So we can live here longer."

"The earth is only ours to borrow...it's for future generations."



Learn more about our future & the legacy we are leaving for future generations

Find out how Okotoks plans to achieve the sustainable future the community desires. The Town's Environmental Master Plan (EMP), developed in consultation with the community, is a long-term plan to help protect and enhance our environment.

It encompasses all aspects, from developing new land, to sustainable practices for energy, water, waste, emissions, green space, construction, and transportation – anything that impacts the natural world.

This plan is a reflection of what we heard from the community – you want Okotoks to be a place that focuses on caring for our environment and creates strong community connections to nature. We hope you use this guide to do just that – share these tips and resources with your children, your families and your neighbours to continue growing your local impact!

www.okotoks.ca/Sustainability