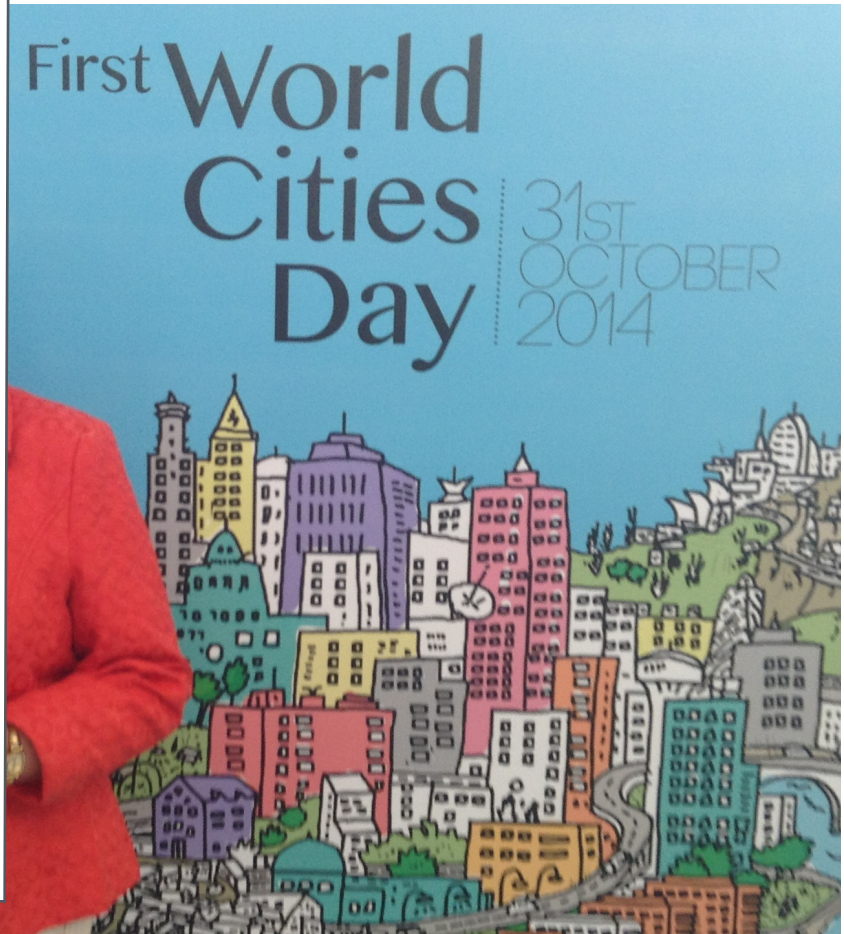


UN HABITAT -  
WORLD URBAN  
FORUM  
Medellin,  
Colombia April 5 -



This session was presented by Sheila Cole, an Environment and Health Educator and Advisor from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Ms Cole played an active role in the achievement of the Halifax initiatives and in bringing them to the attention of global audiences, particularly through UN Habitat's World Urban Forum.

Ms. Cole is Chair of the WUF7 Committee of the Health Caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network.

**08:30 – 10:45**

UN HABITAT, WORLD URBAN FORUM  
Medellin, Colombia April 5 - 11 2014



**11:00 – 12:00**

**Healthy Cities For Healthy Life  
– Halifax, Canada as a Healthy,  
Sustainable Model City**

*Canadian Environmental Network –  
Health Caucus, Canada*



This presentation showcases the Halifax Story - how Halifax, Canada became a global leader in achieving a healthy environment and healthy citizens. Halifax has distinguished itself in 4

areas of action: Non-Smoking legislation; Public Scent-Free policies in schools, hospitals, universities and other public buildings; Pesticide-Free Bylaw and Environmentally Healthy Schools. The session will focus on how environmental groups, local governments, industry, and the medical community worked in partnership in a multi-stakeholder decision-making process to bring this about. It features a power point presentation, detailed indoor air quality chart, and an extensive hands-on resource list to guide you in making your own city an environmentally healthy one that supports the health and longevity of all citizens while reducing costs to the health care system. The discussion portion will include the rationale for the changes, what actions were taken and how the community has benefited from these changes. These actions ensure environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive communities. They contribute to more resilient communities by reducing toxic releases to air, water and soil and are also a benefit in disaster preparedness planning.

This session was presented by the Health Caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) as part of a new category of presentations known as the City Changer category. The "I'm a City Changer" logo was on the cover of WUF7 materials and high-lighted on walls and banners throughout the WUF convention facilities. The session was very well-received and attended by people from over 25 countries.

The city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada was showcased as an example of a city that has made decisions to ensure that it's citizens have a safe and clean environment which benefit both the health of the environment and the public.

The discussion began with an explanation of the "Total Load Concept" – the totality of exposures as they affect both the earth and people – both of which exceed their carrying capacity when they can no longer process or defend themselves from various toxic substances.

The following areas of action were discussed in relation to public health, the environment and indoor air quality.

- **Non-Smoking Legislation** - Introduction of Non-Smoking Legislation for all public buildings, schools, and places of entertainment, thereby improving overall health and reducing healthcare costs as a result of improved indoor air quality.
- **Pesticide Bylaw** - This Bylaw prohibits the use of non-essential pesticides in public areas, schools, playgrounds, hospitals and neighborhoods, thereby minimizing asthma, chemical sensitivities, and other health issues related to exposure to pesticides. People can now exercise freely in healthier, more resilient public spaces, knowing that they will not encounter pesticides. At the same time, urban lands are relieved of chemical releases to air, water and soil thus establishing healthier, more resilient ecosystems.
- **No Scent Policies** - The establishment of "No Scent" Policies in public places has reduced the total carrying load of the body, thereby strengthening overall immunity and resistance to disease. Education on this subject helps people to make choices that give them more control over their health at home and in their work environments. Since less toxic products typically have fewer and milder ingredients, their usage has the added advantage of reducing the burden on wastewater systems.
- **Environmentally Healthy Schools** - The two new schools built in Halifax to the highest environment and health standards (even beyond LEED

standards) have dramatically improved the learning environment for students and staff. One of the more encouraging and obvious benefits is that asthmatic children attending these two schools rarely need to use their “puffers”. The healthier building materials provide a perfect cradle-to-grave solution for buildings. The building principles used for these schools are equally applicable to homes, hospitals and all public buildings.

In discussion, attendees raised numerous issues, such as how to demonstrate the relationship between ill health and chemical exposure. They also wondered how the minds of “old school” medical professionals can be changed to acknowledge that there are now proven links between chemical exposures and certain health outcomes.

We also explored how Halifax achieved its expertise by using Multi-Stakeholder Decision-Making Process. While initially the initiatives were very much citizen-lead, eventually business interests, governments, the medical community, academia and the media were all engaged in bringing about these progressive and far-reaching changes.

In terms of focusing on UN Habitat's specified thematic areas, the session was cross-cutting in several of the themes. With the achieved legislation, bylaws and policies, the Halifax Story figured prominently in Urban Land, Legislation and Governance. The Halifax initiatives also impact the Urban Economy agenda by promoting sustainable development and greening of the economy. The huge reduction in pesticide use strengthens the carrying capacity and resiliency of urban ecosystems while stimulating less toxic (greener) approaches to the care of lawns, parks and public spaces.

The thematic area of Housing and Slum Upgrading was also addressed since building environmentally healthy buildings of any kind has the outcome of greening the building industry in its entirety. Health costs are significantly lowered by providing access to healthier housing and workplaces, recreation facilities and places of worship for all citizens.

The Health Caucus of RCEN in full has engaged with UN Habitat at WUF3 in Canada, WUF4 in China, WUF5 in Brazil and now WUF7 in Colombia. The Caucus has kept step with and contributed to the ongoing dialogue involving the extensive world urban issues. We plan to continue to build our partnership with UN Habitat and to network with attendees through our strong email list, developed during our session.

At Habitat III, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are currently under development. In the environmental community, we often think in terms of "developing sustainability" as opposed to "sustainable development" which can sound as if the main goal is to sustain development. The four Halifax initiatives form a model that can inform the SDGs through the example of developing environmental sustainability, a green economy and improved human and environmental health while also reducing health care costs. The Halifax city-wide dialogue that ensued during these changes and the experience of broad shared decision making contributed to stronger, more resilient ecosystems and a better informed, connected, equitable and resilient city. These factors should figure prominently as an enrichment to the post 2015 agenda as well as the new urban agenda in general, as all partners go forward toward Habitat III.

Sheila Cole  
[sheilacole108@yahoo.ca](mailto:sheilacole108@yahoo.ca)  
902 444 4291  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada