

Green generation gap:

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There are many differences in opinion, action, and belief among generations. When it comes to the planet, younger generations tend to place the blame on their elders for the effects of climate change. While Baby Boomers have long had the reputation of being the generation with the biggest carbon footprint, there is a shift taking place as they get older, and Gen X moves towards bigger homes and larger carbon footprints.

Highlights

- A recent survey¹ conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds Gen X is the new Boomer when it comes to home carbon footprint.
- Most British Columbians think Baby Boomers are the least environmentally conscious generation, but Gen X has the biggest carbon footprint.
- Baby Boomers once lived in the biggest houses with the most amenities but that is shifting as they get older and downsize.
- Gen X are now the most likely generation to live in a single family detached home.
- In fact, their average home size is between 1,500 to 2,000 square feet—twice as large as Millennials, and bigger homes often mean greater energy use.
- While almost a quarter of Gen X think their generation cares the most about the environment and impacts of climate change, over half also admitted they could be doing more to reduce their carbon footprint.
 - They are also the most likely group to think the impact of climate change has been exaggerated.
- But when it comes to giving things up to go green, Gen X is significantly less willing to make sacrifices than Millennials. While they have taken steps in the right direction when it comes to recycling and reducing the use of single use plastics, they are much less willing to give up the gas-powered elements of their lives:
 - Gen X is nearly 60% less likely to give up driving a gas-powered vehicle than Millennials.
 - Gen X is almost 90% less likely to give up using gas appliances than Millennials.
 - Gen X is nearly 60% less likely to give up their gas heating system than Millennials.
- Of British Columbians, Gen X is the most likely to use natural gas heating at home, as well as several other gas-powered appliances and equipment including water heaters, kitchen appliances, fireplaces, lawnmowers, weedwhackers, pressure washers, leaf blowers and patio heaters.
- And older generations do not realize the impact of natural gas on their carbon footprint—just 9% of Boomers and 7% of Gen X named natural gas heating in their homes as having the biggest impact on their home carbon footprint, despite a majority using natural gas as their primary heating method.
- Heating a typical single-family home entirely with natural gas each year can emit about two tonnes of carbon dioxide, which is about the same carbon footprint as driving a fossil-fueled car for 8,000 kilometres, and the addition of other gas appliances on top of this can mean an even bigger carbon footprint.

Solutions

Because 98% of the electricity BC Hydro generates is from clean, renewable resources that are mostly powered by water, using electricity at home in B.C. is a great way to reduce GHG emissions, while keeping household costs down. BC Hydro recommends the following to reduce GHG emissions at home:

¹ Survey conducted by Majid Khoury online of 800 British Columbians between August 15–18, 2022, margin of error +/- 3.46%.

- Using a heat pump: Heating is often the biggest contributor to a home’s carbon footprint, but here in B.C. it does not have to be. Heating with an electric heat pump is a much cleaner, and now cheaper option in B.C. where 98% of the electricity BC Hydro generates comes from clean or renewable resources that are mostly powered by water.
- For the average household in B.C., it is less expensive to heat with an electric heat pump than a natural gas furnace. A natural gas furnace costs around \$731/year to operate, compared to \$642/year to an electric heat pump. Switching to an electric heat pump powered by water will also reduce the average household’s greenhouse gas emissions by about two tonnes per year.
- Choosing electric appliances: Natural gas appliances contribute about half a ton per year to a household’s greenhouse gas emissions—the equivalent of driving your fossil fueled car over 2,000 kilometres.
- Driving an EV: Save on maintenance and fuel costs as well as significantly reducing GHG emissions by switching from a gas-powered vehicle to an EV.
- Heating smart: If installing a heat pump is not an option make sure to use your current heating method efficiently. The thermostat should be set at 16 degrees Celsius when away from home or sleeping, 18 degrees Celsius when cooking or doing housework and 21 degrees Celsius when relaxing at home.

Green generations

Baby Boomers (aged 58–78) are often looked upon as the generation that created problems for Millennials (aged 26–41). And when it comes to the state of the environment and the effects of climate change, Baby Boomers often have the reputation of being a generation with a large carbon footprint to match their large houses and amenities.

However, a recent survey conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds in many ways, Gen X (aged 42–57) is now the new Boomer when it comes to home carbon footprint—especially those that rely heavily on natural gas.

This report will look at what is contributing to the large carbon footprint of Gen X and examine steps they can take to improve.

Green perceptions

Most B.C. Baby Boomers see themselves as very environmentally conscious, but younger generations do not share that view.² In fact, most Millennials think Baby Boomers are the least environmentally conscious generation. For example, on a scale of 1–10 with one being not at all environmentally conscious and 10 being extremely environmentally conscious, over half of Millennials rated Baby Boomers a very low score 1–3.



Over half of Millennials rated Baby Boomers as the least environmentally conscious generation.

While all generations expressed a high level of concern over the effects of climate change, Millennials are the most likely (82 per cent) to be concerned. However, Gen X was the most likely group to say that they think the impact of climate change has been exaggerated.

X is the new Boomer








While most British Columbians, especially the younger generations think Baby Boomers are the least environmentally conscious generation, Gen X now has the biggest home carbon footprint—particularly those that rely heavily on natural gas.

This is mostly due to a shift that is taking place among the generations. Baby Boomers once lived in the biggest houses with the most amenities but that is changing as they get older and downsize.

² On a scale of 1–10 with 10 being extremely environmentally conscious and 1 being not at all, 56% of B.C. Baby Boomers rated themselves between a 7 and 10.

For example, Gen X are now the most likely generation to live in a single-family, detached home. The average home size for Gen X is between 1,500 to 2,000 square feet—twice as large as Millennials, and bigger homes often mean greater energy use.

WHAT B.C. GENERATIONS THINK HAS THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON THEIR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Action	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
 Driving a gas vehicle	32%	31%	20%	16%
 Air travel	13%	14%	19%	18%
 Using single-use plastics	18%	13%	14%	18%
 Consuming animals/ animal products	8%	12%	15%	28%
 Using fossil fuels to heat my home	9%	7%	5%	8%
 Shopping or consuming a lot	5%	5%	9%	13%
 Other	2%	3%	3%	0



Most do not realize home heating choice has the biggest impact on their carbon footprint—about two tonnes per year in GHG emissions for the average single family home.

Giving up to go green

While almost a quarter of Gen X think their generation cares the most about the environment and impacts of climate change, over half also admitted they could be doing more to reduce their carbon footprint.

But when it comes to giving things up to become greener, Gen X is significantly less willing to make sacrifices than Millennials. While they have taken steps in the right direction when it comes to recycling and reducing the use of single use plastics, they are much less willing to give up the gas-powered elements of their lives. For example, Gen X is nearly 60% less likely to give up driving a gas-powered vehicle than Millennials, and nearly 60% less likely to give up their gas heating system. Gen X is also almost 90% less likely to give up using gas appliances than Millennials.

Gas impacts

Generations were asked what they think is the number one thing they do that negatively impacts their carbon footprint—and it turns out, not many realize the impact of natural gas. Just 9% of Boomers and 7% of Gen X named natural gas heating in their homes as having the biggest impact on their home carbon footprint, despite a majority using natural gas as their primary heating method.

Of British Columbians, Gen X is the most likely to use natural gas heating at home, as well as several other gas-powered appliances and equipment including water heaters, kitchen appliances, fireplaces, lawnmowers, weedwhackers, pressure washers, leaf blowers and patio heaters. Heating a typical single-family home entirely with natural gas each year can emit about two tonnes of carbon dioxide, which is about the same carbon footprint as driving a fossil-fueled car for 8,000 kilometres, and the addition of other gas appliances contributes even more.

Empowering younger generations to think green

This fall BC Hydro is teaching youth in over 100 B.C. classrooms about energy conservation to empower them to be leaders in their community. Each week from Oct 4–21, grades 4–7 students across B.C. will learn about how electricity is generated, why it's important to conserve and how to support conservation to help fight climate change. As part of BC Hydro's Boost Your Power Smarts campaign to learn more visit schools.bchydro.com/take-action/boost-your-power-smarts.

Green solutions

Because 98% of the electricity BC Hydro generates is from clean, renewable resources that are mostly powered by water, using electricity instead of fossil fuels at home in B.C. is a great way to reduce your GHG emissions, while keeping household costs down.

Heating is often the biggest contributor to a home's carbon footprint, but here in B.C. it does not have to be. Heating with an electric heat pump is a much cleaner, and now cheaper option in B.C. where 98% of the electricity BC Hydro generates comes from clean or renewable resources that are mostly powered by water. For the average household in B.C., it is less expensive to heat with an electric heat pump than a natural gas furnace. A natural gas furnace costs around \$731/year to operate, compared to \$642/year to an electric heat pump. Switching to an electric heat pump powered by water will also reduce the average household's greenhouse gas emissions by about two tonnes per year. If installing a heat pump is not an option, make sure to use your current heating method efficiently. The thermostat should be set at 16 degrees Celsius when away from home or sleeping, 18 degrees Celsius when cooking or doing housework and 21 degrees Celsius when relaxing at home.

Another way to go green is by choosing electric appliances. Natural gas appliances contribute about half a ton per year to a household's greenhouse gas emissions—the equivalent of driving your fossil fueled car over 2,000 kilometres. Speaking of driving, another great way to significantly reduce emissions while saving on maintenance and fuel costs is by switching from a gas-powered vehicle to an EV.

Visit bchydro.com/clean for more details on heat pump rebates and an in-depth guide to purchasing an EV.

