

Toronto Star

Time to turn over a new Leaf

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With an ever-increasing focus on how we can all address climate change and global warming, sports arenas throughout North America are gearing up to go green. The race to blend clean alternative energies with smart design is on. Is Toronto in?

North America's insatiable demand for energy is creating rising carbon dioxide emissions that are melting land glaciers at a record rate. In fact, within approximately the next 15 years, the ice caps on tropical glaciers in the Andes and Africa will be gone. It is clearer than ever that we must all now do our part and begin to reduce our carbon footprint and the amount of energy we use.

Sports facilities around the world are recognizing the need to make changes and reduce their dependency on oil, gas and coal-based energies. As a result, some innovative changes are afoot.

The new Nationals Stadium in Washington, D.C., will boast a green filtration system designed to filter general debris; one for stadium debris like peanut shells and candy wrappers and one for fertilizers. As a result, the Anacostia River will be protected from unwanted runoff.

Nashville's minor-league baseball team, the Sounds, is considering carpeting its stadium roof with a low-lying succulent plant called sedum. Sedum roofs both look good and help the environment by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The use of sedum is popular in Europe; in fact, 10 per cent of buildings throughout Germany have sedum roofs.

Green arena innovations continue elsewhere. The Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Mass., has a water-filtration system that collects and recirculates black and grey water. Last year in Miami, Super Bowl XLI put more than 450,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide into the air, not including air travel. To counteract this, the NFL planted more than 3,000 trees throughout Florida to help offset its greenhouse gases.

Recently, the San Francisco Giants teamed up with Pacific Gas & Electric Company to make AT&T Park the first stadium in Major League Baseball to go solar. Now, 590 panels will generate about 120 kilowatts of energy – enough to power more than 20 homes for an entire year.

Excess power generated by the panels not used by AT&T Park will be fed back into the power grid to supply homeowners with energy.

In addition, AT&T Park will install a new scoreboard that uses 78 per cent less energy than the ballpark's original scoreboard.

And while San Francisco is not sun-rich, the ocean fog that frequently rolls in and out of the city enables the tallest trees on Earth – coastal redwoods – to live at their southern extremity.

In contrast, the Toronto area receives more than 2,000 hours of sunshine a year, significantly more than San Francisco. Both the Air Canada Centre and the Rogers Centre could easily be fitted with solar panels that would offset the need to use conventional power from the grid. Both facilities could either sell any excess energy back into the Toronto energy grid or sell their green credits in Chicago on the open market.

In addition, both stadiums could utilize wind turbines in partnership with Toronto Hydro Energy Services to further counterbalance the amount of energy that the respective teams are using. Toronto already has Canada's first urban wind turbine, so why not implement two more for both of its world-class sports facilities?

It is vitally important for the Leafs, Raptors and Blue Jays to reduce their carbon footprint and show an ongoing commitment to the environment. All three teams and facilities are respected across Canada and North America and are in a position to take leadership on this issue.

Going green at Toronto's sports arenas will lift the bar and set a challenge for Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver to follow, kick-starting a new wave in the NHL and getting the green ball bouncing in the NBA.

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