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MEDIA RELEASE

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Study suggests next step for BC's pioneering carbon neutral public sector

British Columbia's pioneering move to create North America's first carbon neutral public sector comes under the spotlight today, with the release of new research from the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS).

The report - *Lessons from British Columbia's "carbon neutral government" mandate* - co-authored by Kim Lau and Hadi Dowlatabadi from the University of British Columbia (UBC), is an independent white paper from PICS, a collaboration of BC's four research-intensive universities led by the University of Victoria.

Co-author Kim Lau says the BC government's leadership on carbon neutrality is commendable, especially given the ambitious scope of the project involving some 300,000 employees, and the aggressive 2010 deadline it set in 2007. The zero carbon targets are currently being met by BC public sector organizations (PSOs) through a combination of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and purchasing offsets through the Pacific Carbon Trust (PCT).

Lau says the next step for the province could be to give PSOs more flexibility in how they meet their GHG reduction targets by expanding the types of emissions they can include in their calculations. "Currently PSOs mainly report on scope 1 and scope 2 emissions which are either produced on-site (such as furnaces to heat classrooms) or produced off-site due to electricity purchases. The only scope 3 (indirect) emissions being reported are core government business travel and office paper usage, but this category could be expanded."

Reporting the indirect emissions generated from activities such as employee business travel and commuting, contractors' services, and construction would open up more options for PSOs to reduce their total carbon footprint at a lower cost than purchasing PCT offsets, thus saving money. The report recommends not requiring these extra indirect emissions to be reduced or offset, but only assessed and reported, to avoid imposing additional financial burdens on PSOs.

For example the report shows that UBC's plan to build energy efficient rental housing for an additional 8,000 students on campus could result in a 20 percent drop in commuting emissions. However under the current regulations, what should be a credit to UBC for removing more than 7,700 tonnes of provincial emissions (due to less commuting and more energy efficient housing) turns into a penalty, with UBC having to face an additional \$145,000 per year in offset liability due to the extra on-site emissions due to occupation of the housing development.

The inclusion of contractors' emissions could encourage them to 'green' their operations in order to become preferred suppliers. It would also help close a current loophole for emission leakage from the public sector through outsourcing of services, whereby emissions are not reduced but simply shifted outside the reporting PSO.

Lau says such ongoing improvements to the BC's government's bold mandate on carbon neutrality should ideally motivate individuals, organizations and other jurisdictions to follow suit. He says cynicism has become an unfortunate by-product of the worldwide rush for carbon neutrality branding, so the report encourages all jurisdictions to be open and transparent in how they calculate their carbon neutral status.

The white paper can be read at http://pics.uvic.ca/white_papers.php

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