

RESCON, RCCAO discuss creating climate change fighting coalition

Grant Cameron October 11, 2019



Builders and some unions in Ontario's residential and civil sectors are looking at joining forces with other industry and business groups to form a national coalition focused solely on fighting climate change.

The coalition is still in its infancy stage and doesn't yet have a name, but both the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) and the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)** are on board with the initiative in principle dependent on a mandate being developed.

RESCON, which represents more than 200 builders of new homes and condominiums in Ontario, and the RCCAO, an alliance of labour and management groups in the residential low-rise, high-rise and civil sectors of the construction industry, are presently discussing the specifics of what the mandate will be.

The two groups are working with a major foundation and hope to have a mandate developed by October. The next step will be to develop a position paper and grow the coalition provincially and nationally.

“The idea is to have a broad coalition of all industries or businesses in the Canadian economy,” explained RESCON president Richard Lyall. “There needs to be a singular voice on this with an eye to focusing on what is really being done. This would be a climate-purposed entity rather than having climate change on a long agenda of other items.”

RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan said there are still a few matters to address but the two groups are supportive of the coalition because climate change is such an important issue and a concerted effort must be made by construction as well as other industries and sectors to bring about change.

“Best wishes and intentions are not going to get us there. We will be discussing more specifically what the mandate and specific actions are going to be. RESCON and RCCAO are in the same boat with respect to that.”

The two organizations got involved in the coalition as a result of an idea that originated with Phil Rubinoff, current chairman of the RCCAO board and chairman emeritus of RESCON. As a grandparent, he was concerned there wasn't enough being done by business, industry and governments to tackle climate change.

“My thinking was that there should be a coalition,” he said. “I was thinking about a coalition of grandparents and that had nothing to do with the building industry. But I said to myself, ‘because I’m active in both RCCAO and RESCON, maybe I would bring it to those boards,’ and both boards are quite supportive.”

Rubinoff figured a coalition was needed because despite the fact that young people were mobilizing, others were worried nothing was really being done. Eventually, RESCON and the RCCAO teamed up with an individual, who at the behest of a large foundation, was looking to do the same thing.

“We are not experts on climate change or global warming,” said Rubinoff. “But we, as a group and individually, feel it’s the most important thing that’s happened in the last thousand years and we’re concerned about it.”

First and foremost, Rubinoff said, people must admit that they are part of the contribution to climate change.

“Some people can quibble about how big a part of the problem we are but that doesn’t matter,” he said. “Every little bit counts. It might be only two per cent of global CO2 emissions but every emission or any excess emissions are a problem, and we produce excess emissions so we are part of the problem.”

“We need to be there and, as best we can, guide government policy in a predictable and stable manner and also help them avoid some potential pitfalls out there but then take concerted national action. Industry needs to speak with one voice on climate policy, we feel. It’s the right thing to do for all these reasons.”

While it's still early days, Lyall of RESCON said there are already a half dozen groups that are prepared to get on board.

"It's very nascent. We're right at the beginning stages of this. We're approaching this with the best of intentions."

Lyall said that science shows that climate change is real and is happening faster than people think so there's a need for immediate action.

"Climate is bigger than any particular party or area. Climate issues are national, they're global, they transcend political lines. This is kind of akin to an asteroid coming to Earth. We can save it but we've got to get our act together and work together."

The view, said Lyall, is that industry needs to speak to government with one voice to tell politicians to get their act together and guide them on what needs to be done.

The coalition, he noted, will be focused solely on climate change so its agenda doesn't get bogged down by other issues.

"Industry really needs to help guide the government in term of policies and regulations on this because, after all, we know what can work and what won't work within our respective industries and where you can get the biggest bang for the buck in terms of climate-mitigation measures."