



ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Continuing the regular series of 'pull out' features for *Change Your World*: four pages of handy tips on how you can use Information Technology to further your campaigns.

In this feature, Donald Ritchie, Local Groups Development Co-ordinator, introduces a new service for local campaigners who have access to e-mail. Read on to find out how you can join a range of discussion groups and mailing lists on different campaigns. In a future issue we will look at the world wide web as a campaigning and communications tool.

FOE NETWORKS GO INTO CYBERSPACE

December sees the launch of a new electronic networking service for local groups which aims to make information sharing and campaign planning much easier. Eleven issue-specific mailing lists and discussion groups have been created, enabling those of you with e-mail accounts to have rapid communication with fellow campaigners across the country.

Local groups have been quick to see the advantage of e-mail as a campaigning tool. Approximately a third of local campaigners have e-mail accounts and more people are getting connected every month.

The value of e-mail for local group campaigning was a key learning lesson from the 1996 West Yorkshire Pilot Project. Since then there's been further evidence of how e-mail can work for us. For instance, *Climate Online* has proved to be a very effective tool for the climate campaign, and *Envlist*, an e-mail discussion group created by Neil Jones of Swansea FOE last year, has demonstrated the demand for electronic networking.

Access to good information is essential for effective campaigning. A great deal of this information resides amongst local groups, and so it makes best sense to help groups exchange information directly. The new e-mail networks are a step towards achieving this aim. Add to this the fact that they're a forum for sharing best practice and a channel for rapid communication too, then the benefits of electronic networking are certainly worth considering.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

Two phases of implementation are planned. The first phase is for the campaigns covered by currently established campaign networks, which is launched on 1 December and described in detail below.

The second phase is completely open to your needs. These could be for campaign issues not already covered by the campaign networks, regional or area networks, fundraising or group organisational issues – whatever you want. As long as there's a clear remit for the discussion group and more than one person wants to participate in it, we'll set up the infrastructure to make it happen and to promote it. The second phase will be launched on 1 February and full details will appear in the next *Change Your World*.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

Discussion groups are now set up for eleven campaign areas, waiting for you to subscribe. Their purpose is to share information and to provide a forum for discussing anything related to the specific issue. The names of discussion groups are as follows, along with a brief description of their remit:

climate_change Pushing the Government to stick to its target of a 20 per cent reduction in CO₂ by 2010; campaigning for policy and investment changes to shift from fossil fuels and nuclear to renewables and energy efficiency; energy liberalisation.

food Exposing and opposing intensive farming and genetically engineered crops; creating the demand and political pressure for real food.

forests Campaigning on the destruction of natural forests, focusing on the UK's impact; campaigning for less wood and paper consumption and responsible sourcing of timber.

hormone_disrupting_chemicals Campaigning for the phasing-out of hormone-disrupting chemicals; demanding action on the tens of thousands of chemicals in use that haven't been safely tested.

housing Campaigning for the Government to change its policy so that 75 per cent of new housing is in urban areas; fighting housing proposals on greenfield sites, linking local housing campaigns and demonstrating how traffic reduction policies can help.

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local_agenda_21 Co-ordinating FOE's approach to LA21; sharing best practice in local sustainability.

roads Campaigning for further cuts in the national roads programme, and for the money saved to be spent on public transport alternatives; campaigning for the cancellation of the most damaging current schemes, such as the Birmingham Northern Relief Road.

sustainable_consumption A long-term campaign to reduce consumption to a level that does not threaten the environment; pressing for policies which increase the efficiency of material use; promoting public debate around consumerism and quality of life.

traffic_reduction Campaigning for less traffic through improved public transport, better facilities for cyclists and walkers, safe routes to school and other means.

uk_wildlife Campaigning for a new Wildlife Act that fully protects the UK's richest and rarest habitats; fighting against the destruction of SSSIs and other wildlife habitats.

waste Campaigning against waste disposal by landfill or incineration; campaigning for waste prevention, reuse, recycling and composting.

About 6 months ago a number of us in Devon with e-mail got together to set up an ad hoc e-mail list on Housing. We are all campaigning against the Structure Plan housing allocation and the possibility of two new towns in Devon. We have members from Exeter FOE, Torbay FOE, North Devon FOE, CPRE, Transport 2000, Green Party and specific local groups like DONT (Devon Opposed to New Towns) and SHARD (South Hams against Rural Destruction).

Basically, we communicate using e-mail – thus we don't really need meetings. The benefits in terms of coordinating the campaign and sending letters and arranging stunts is plain to see. The e-mail conference effectively becomes a long protracted meeting – sounds horrific, doesn't it? But it works really well. I believe this is the future of campaigning. It is loosely organised, but that's what appeals to me – it's very much a bottom-up approach to campaigning.

(Thanks to Maurice Spurway from Exeter FOE.)

HOW DOES IT WORK?

If you're interested in any of the campaigns described above then all you have to do is sign up to the discussion group. You'll then have an open channel with all of the other subscribers – you'll receive their mailings and be able to mail them yourself.

You can sign up to as many discussion groups as you like, but it's advisable to stick to the issue you're most interested in. If you subscribe to too many groups then you'll soon find you're inundated with unwanted e-mail. Ultimately, each group is only as good as its mailings, so it's in the hands of subscribers to make the group a worthwhile experience.

All subscribers also sign up to two principles: **moderation** and a **protocol**. These exist to ensure the smooth running of each discussion group and are based on best practice.

Each discussion group is required to elect a moderator – someone who makes sure that the group functions effectively. This is an important job but shouldn't be too time-consuming – the key functions are as follows:

- **Keeping the list up to date.** For instance, if individual mailings bounce back because the address isn't recognised, the moderator would investigate.
- **Monitoring compliance with the protocol.** The moderator may intercede if they consider that individual postings break the protocol, and may also unsubscribe repeat offenders.
- **Advising on development of the group.** This may involve taking forward ideas for improving the group. For instance, the group may wish to sub-divide so that its remit is more clearly defined, it may wish to introduce information-only mailings for people who don't want to read the chat, or it may wish to include non-FOE subscribers.

The moderator must be a local group member. Staff may have a role in two situations – conducting a contested election for the moderator, and as a channel for complaints about the moderator. Each discussion group is required to abide by a simple protocol, to guarantee that the group best meets the needs of its subscribers. The protocol has three basic rules:

- All mailings must be relevant to the purpose of the discussion group.
- All information mailed to the group must be accurate, or clearly labelled as speculative. This ensures that misinformation isn't taken as fact.
- The following behaviours are not acceptable: selling of goods or services (or any other advertising whereby the mailer may gain); personal arguments (as opposed to reasoned debate based on mutual goodwill); improper conduct (for instance offensive language, racism, sexism etc). These rules ensure that group members are not in any way abused.

CHANGE YOUR WORLD THE NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE EARTH'S LOCAL GROUPS

I e-mail my local MPs regularly, and as well as the various local and national issues about which I've informed or lobbied them, I've got at least two different EDMs signed by them this year. In Luton we can now e-mail councillors too.

(Thanks to David Oakley-Hill from Luton FOE)

WHO CAN SUBSCRIBE?

Discussion groups are being set up for the benefit of FOE local groups. To start with, only the following people may subscribe: local group members, staff and Board members.

However there are a lot of environmental campaigners out there who aren't part of FOE, and involving these people may well bring added value. Involving non-FOE subscribers is a decision for each discussion group, once it's established.

Should discussion groups choose to extend beyond FOE then the information that's posted may be distributed far and wide, making FOE information far less secure. This means that the group could no longer be a forum for discussing FOE's campaign strategies, or specific tactics and actions. We cannot risk potential adversaries getting advance notice of what we're planning or thinking, or indeed picking up on the lessons that we learn from experience.

HOW TO SIGN UP

Send a message to majordomo@foe.co.uk from your own e-mail account – that's the account to which you'd like your mailings to be sent. Leave the subject line blank, and in the message body write **subscribe the_name_of_the_list**. The list names are exactly as printed above.

Here are a couple of examples:

To sign up to the climate change discussion group you'd e-mail majordomo@foe.co.uk, leave your subject line blank, and write in the message body:

subscribe climate_change

Alternatively, to join the waste discussion group, your message would read:

subscribe waste

You can also subscribe from someone else's e-mail account, but if you do this then you'll have to add an extra command to say who you are. For instance if your e-mail address is **dennis@arsenal.co.uk**, and you want to subscribe to the forests discussion group from your mum's e-mail account (but don't want the messages sent to her account), then your message would read:

subscribe forests dennis@arsenal.co.uk

Sounds easy? Well it is, but one word of caution – if your command isn't 100 per cent accurate then it won't work. You'll soon find out, because we'll confirm that you've subscribed and send you information about how the discussion group operates.

MAILING LISTS

Mailing lists are also being set up for eleven campaign networks (these will cover the same campaign areas as the discussion groups); membership is restricted to people on e-mail who are registered to the respective campaign network. The purpose of mailing lists is to send information about FOE campaign activities, which for operational reasons needs to remain confidential. Mailing list members will also be asked, on occasion, to comment on the campaign's strategies and tactics.

If you're a member of a campaign network and we have your e-mail address, then you'll automatically go onto the specific campaign network mailing list from 1 December; for some campaign networks (eg 'climatecls', which exists for the climate change campaign network), this will simply replace the existing mailing list.

If you're campaigning on one of the eleven issues and you're not on the Campaign Network then it's a good idea to join. Your Co-ordinator should have the details, or you can contact Tricia Allen for an introductory booklet about FOE's Campaign Networks (ring 0171 566 1693 or e-mail triciaa@foe.co.uk). As well as going on the e-mail mailing list, benefits of joining include regular information, opportunities to share skills, direct support including training, and participation in the development of future campaign strategies. Please note that campaign network members who are not on e-mail also receive the level of service described above.

When Channel 4's "Against Nature" was broadcast on TV last year, it contained a lot of attacks on FOE and other environmentalists. E-mail networks were used to correct the misinformation which was broadcast in the programme, and to build a successful campaign to lodge a complaint with the ITC. Eventually, an apology was broadcast stating that FOE and other environmentalists had been misrepresented.

(Thanks to Paul Graves-Brown of Swansea FOE.)

AND FINALLY...

Discussion groups are there for the benefit of local groups. Over time you may well see ways that they can be improved, in which case do feed your views to your moderator. We're committed to developing and improving electronic networking systems for local groups, but this can only be achieved if you say what you want – once you've signed up, it's as easy as the touch of a button.

Meanwhile, watch this space for further developments. The next issue of *Change Your World* will have details of the next phase of discussion groups to be introduced, and every issue in future will have details of the groups that are operational.

AND REMEMBER... IT'S GOOD TO TALK.

If you're trying to join a discussion group and have followed the guidelines above but are still having problems, you can contact Donald Ritchie for more information on 0171 566 1684.

I was campaigning about an opencast coal mine – I am an archaeologist and in this instance there was an important archaeological impact if the opencast mine went ahead. Apart from writing to every councillor I used two Internet archaeology discussion lists to publicise the issue and asked subscribers to write objections. I think the council in Neath Port Talbot were a bit surprised to receive faxed letters of objection from as far away as Canada, and despite the fact that we lost on this issue, it does show how the Internet can be used to enlist help from particular interest groups.

(Thanks to Paul Graves-Brown of Swansea FOE.)

I have found the Internet immeasurably useful in my campaigning against organo-chlorine pollution. It is very useful to be able to look at the latest governmental press releases, or copies of Hansard on the World Wide Web. Here's a recent example of cheap, fast, dynamic networking. We are currently looking for solutions to decontaminating a local area. Part is used for grazing, with a public footpath, despite very high levels of dioxin contamination. Just this month, I was trying to find out the latest technology to remedy soil contamination. By coincidence, a campaigner in the US e-mailed a new report on this topic, dated 7.10.98, to a work colleague of mine. E-mail has enabled me to have a cheap, speedy dialogue with her in the US, and also to have a copy of this report on my computer within minutes instead of days, at the cost of a local phone call. If I need to quote selected parts of the report, I have the original on the computer and can swiftly cut and paste bits into a letter or report of my own.

(Thanks to Viv Mountford of Halton Friends of the Earth.)

ENVLIST

Envlister is an Internet list server for environmental lists. It was set up by Neil Jones of Swansea FOE in 1997, to facilitate information exchange, discussion, and sharing of opinions and tactics on many aspects of environmental campaigning. A central e-mail address acts as a postbox from which copies of messages are sent to all participants. To join, e-mail Neil Jones at Neil@nwjones.demon.co.uk

CLIMATE ONLINE AND VIRTUAL DAISY

FOE also runs two public e-mail networks for the climate and wildlife campaigns.

To register for regular action updates, send an e-mail to: majordomo@foe.co.uk, leaving the subject line blank.

To join Climate Online, put the words `subscribe climateonline` in the main message body.

To sign up to the virtual daisy, put the words `subscribe chain_of_protection` in the main message body.

(NB: These are not discussion groups – when you subscribe, you will receive regular calls to action).