

- Leora Kornfeld: [00:08](#) Welcome to Now & Next, a podcast brought to you by the Canada Media Fund. I'm Leora Kornfeld. On this episode, the greening of TV and film production with Zena Harris of the environmental consultancy Green Spark Group.
- Leora Kornfeld: [00:24](#) The creative industries, it turns out, have significant environmental impacts. We tend to think that once physical products like videos and CDs and DVDs fell by the way that we were more or less good. Gone where the concerns about plastic and aluminum and cardboard packaging, all that stuff. It turns out no, not so fast. A recent study showed that digital technologies and streaming produce even more carbon emissions than the aerospace industry. And then there's TV and film production. Some have likened the process to a traveling circus because of the army of trailers and generators and catering and costume, hair and makeup people, and there's also the raw materials required for set construction and decoration. Oh, and don't forget vehicles idling for hours on end.
- Leora Kornfeld: [01:18](#) Zena Harris thinks there's a better way to approach things for the good of the planet and for the good of the budget. And that sounds like a win-win to me.
- Leora Kornfeld: [01:41](#) In just a second, my conversation with environmental consultant to the motion picture and entertainment industry Zena Harris. Zena, how and when did this eco sensibility onset start?
- Zena Harris: [01:54](#) One of the key milestones I think was in 2006. There was a report that came out from UCLA talking about the impacts of the motion picture industry in comparison to other industries. And that's when many of the larger studios started hiring sustainability directors and really focusing their efforts on impact reduction. And so that's when I believe it really started and it's just been growing since then. I mean, other programs, like Reel Green in B.C. also started in '06. So you know there might've been some efforts happening in various places, but nothing was really coordinated until around '06 I would say.
- Leora Kornfeld: [02:34](#) And was it more of a bottom up initiative, something that was coming from the people who worked on the crews or was it a top down thing coming from the studios and the producers?
- Zena Harris: [02:42](#) It's both actually. I mean back then it may have been a more of a top down or more internal through the larger studios. But I don't want to underestimate the power of the crew and what they've been able to do. I mean, some folks are really innovative

and we're seeing now in the work that we do that crew members... when we are engaging crew, if we're on production, we're on a show and we're engaging crew in a consistent way, they've got a lot of ideas. They want to implement sustainable production practices. They want to be able to bring their ideas forward and really take agency over this. And so we're seeing that groundswell from the crew. And then we're also seeing larger studios. They've got their sustainability mandates and they want to integrate sustainable production. So we're seeing it from that way too.

Zena Harris: [03:32](#) So, it's a little bit of both. I would say that crews are, they're out there. They're rocking it. They want to do this. And the studios don't want to say no to lowering their impact. And so they welcome any ideas and feedback and any initiative that productions do take.

Leora Kornfeld: [03:51](#) And what's your background? How did you get involved in all this?

Zena Harris: [03:54](#) It started when I was at a job at a large corporation. I was working in human resources and I didn't even know corporate sustainability was a thing. And so I was trying to figure out why I was training people on practices that I knew weren't quite right or processes that are a little bit broken and that sort of thing. And so I was really struggling with that.

Zena Harris: [04:15](#) And so I started looking around what does this mean, how can I improve these processes and efficiency and all of this. And I found a graduate program at Harvard and I started in sustainability and environmental management and focused on corporate sustainability. And within that entertainment always lag behind in rating and ranking reports that would come out at the time. And I thought, well my gosh, if entertainment is lagging behind, why is that if it's such an influential sector. And that started this whole ball rolling.

Zena Harris: [04:49](#) I moved to Vancouver just after I graduated and I didn't realize at the time, but Vancouver is, and it still is, but I didn't know I was moving to the third largest film hub in North America. So I started looking around and thinking, oh my gosh, there's a lot of filming going on here. What's going on with sustainability? And start to reaching out to many organizations and finding out who the vendors were, what was going on, was there a consistent way of doing this and decided that there was a place in the market for a company to do this. And that's when I started

Green Spark Group and started working specifically on production and in sustainability in the industry at large, so.

Leora Kornfeld: [05:33](#) It's interesting to think about when with the shift to digital, whether it's a music or any kind of product, we think if we're not consuming something that comes in a box or that has plastic involved, or vinyl, cardboard, whatever it is, we tend to think then it doesn't have an environmental impact. But I was really surprised to learn, for example, that the environmental impact of streaming music in terms of greenhouse gas emissions from storage, servers, electricity, all of those things is actually greater than what we had from when we had the physical products. That's really something to think about. And when you started working in this area, what were some of those startling statistics that jumped out at you?

Zena Harris: [06:14](#) It's kind of one of those things that you don't quite know what the impact is until you start measuring it. And I got in and started working on production and started measuring the carbon footprint of each production that I worked on. And then as my team grew, as we worked on. And what we're seeing, and this is very clear, no matter where you're shooting, that fuel consumption is one of the largest contributors to the greenhouse gas emission profile. So I would say fuel.

Zena Harris: [06:43](#) And also another one is food. Simply reducing red meat. I didn't really think much about that early on as one of the things to focus on with production. But as we're learning and food is getting served every day and lots of it that cutting out red meat is significant in terms of the greenhouse gas emission reduction that can actually take place. So that's another one that it doesn't cost any money to do and it actually saves a lot in emissions and can also save money right off the bat, because you're not paying for expensive food like meat. So that's another one that I think is really important for people to understand when they're planning out their meals.

Leora Kornfeld: [07:28](#) I can't be the only one who wonders this, but where do all those uneaten doughnuts go? I always think about donuts when I think about film sets. Where do they go?

Zena Harris: [07:35](#) Well, there are a couple of options there. If their production has compost, they might go into the compost bin, but if their production decides to donate food, any food on the catering line could go to a shelter or nonprofit. That I think is a really key thing to note is that in every province in Canada, it is legal to donate food and in every state in the US it's legal to donate

food. So there is no reason why good food cannot be donated. It takes just a little bit of effort to do. Shelters are really excited to have the food and it can be a win-win all the way around. The production will then also save money. Because if you think about it, if you're taking trays of food that is good food to a homeless shelter, you're not putting it in, say a compost or worst-case landfill bin, which means you're not then paying for that extra volume to be disposed of later and tipping fees for waste can get expensive. So that's a cost savings on the back end that the production is not having to pay.

Leora Kornfeld: [08:40](#) And why was it illegal before to donate the unused food?

Zena Harris: [08:43](#) It really wasn't illegal. I mean it's been legal in Canada for years. So I think it was a myth really. Maybe people got turned away because a particular shelter you didn't want a certain type of food or whatever the case is. There's always a story around this, but it is absolutely legal to donate food and the donor is protected from liability to donate. Every single one of the productions that I've worked on, and I'm sure that, I want to say that take place really everywhere, need to have licensed caterers and food service providers delivering the food. So there should be no reason why that food wouldn't be prepared in a safe manner and then therefore could be donated safely.

Leora Kornfeld: [09:30](#) I believe this is one of your pet peeves on set, the bottled water.

Zena Harris: [09:34](#) Yes, absolutely. It is definitely a pet peeve. It is something that comes up all the time. Everybody notices bottled water and they all want to get rid of it. You're talking about crew who voiced their opinion. This is one of the first things that comes up when we're talking to crew on set is bottled water. Nobody really likes it but it's always there and so there's really no reason for that. I mean, the water line item on production can, you can see significant savings if the production decides to go with bulk water in larger jugs like the 18.9 liter jugs or in the states five gallon jugs. And in they're basically the large refillable water jugs that crew members can fill up their reusable water bottles and they are good to go. And that is a massive cost savings.

Zena Harris: [10:28](#) So I'll just give you an example. What we're seeing on the shows that we work on, just water bottles alone and substituting with these larger jugs of water can save them from what we're seeing on our shows, an average of \$63,000 from the shows that we've worked on.

Leora Kornfeld: [10:45](#) \$63,000, is that on a feature film that you're talking?

- Zena Harris: [10:49](#) I'm talking on average from the shows that we've worked on at Green Spark Group. So we've worked on mostly yeah, features and large TV series. So larger productions. But that water savings is significant, just by choosing to go with the larger jug of water and a reusable water bottle. So I think when productions start really diving into these numbers and hearing that and we're seeing this data consistently, I think that's going to really shift behavior because there is no reason why a production couldn't use reusable water bottles or as an alternative water in aluminum cans that can be, that have a screw top because those can be reused over and over and over again as well. If you happen to need a quick single use kind of bottle that would be the next best, but there's no reason why production couldn't use reusable water bottles and large jugs.
- Leora Kornfeld: [11:50](#) Is there a budget level at which it sense to start greening a production?
- Zena Harris: [11:55](#) No. I would say any production, no matter the size can implement sustainable production practices. I mean we are seeing, obviously, large productions are doing this. Any production can do it. Even a small indie film, commercial shoots are very small and very fast. Larger productions, obviously, you see larger cost savings because it's just a larger production and you see these economies of scale there. But any production can implement this. We worked with a production in Vancouver and it was a short film and they shot in four days and they went so far as the producer was called a sustainable producer, period. That was the ethos of the production and it didn't cost them a lot of money to go that route. And it's actually easier for smaller productions because they are more nimble and can adapt and implement some of these practices a lot easier than say larger productions where you're having to integrate through 100 people or 200 people. So it's easier for smaller ones, but anybody can do it.
- Leora Kornfeld: [13:13](#) Are there a couple of either studios, producers or shows that you can point to as examples of people who are really leading the way in this regard?
- Zena Harris: [13:23](#) Sure. A producer close by in Vancouver, her name is Clara George and she is leading the charge and implementing sustainable production practices across the board, in every department on her show. And she loves data. So she, of course, is tracking everything and they're saving a lot of money and they're saving a lot of resources and greenhouse gas emissions. And so she is on The Magicians, she's a producer on The

Magicians. And at the very beginning, and this is what we recommend anybody do, at the very beginning, talk to your crew about this and talk to every department about this. So sit down with every department head and talk about what is important to them, what they can do throughout this particular production, every production's different. So what's going to make sense here and really start working toward that over the course of production. And I think what's really important too is giving examples of the wins during production, what's going on. So Clara does this on her production.

Zena Harris: [14:29](#) I mean, and then we've got others, other great examples. So in the, in the states, the Producers Guild of America has a green committee called the PGA Green and the producers that are a part of that. So, for example, Mary-Jo Winkler in New York, she implement sustainable production practices on every single production and is just like Clara. I mean she makes sure that every department knows that this is important and that this is part of the ethos of the production.

Zena Harris: [14:58](#) So it's out there, it's happening. People are taking the lead. Producers are really starting to step up and saying that it's setting the expectation upfront that this is what they want and crew follow suit. I mean this is how it works and they actually have fun I think in the process and some are actually kind of relieved that their production is sustainably focused. So it can really be a motivating factor, I think.

Leora Kornfeld: [15:25](#) Thank you very much Zena Harris.

Zena Harris: [15:27](#) Thank you.

Leora Kornfeld: [15:32](#) And that's it for another episode of Now and Next, brought to you by the Canada Media Fund. You can find us in the usual places you find your podcasts and you know what they all say, don't forget to subscribe, that way you won't miss any new episodes. And rating or reviewing is also a big help. So if you have a few seconds for that, that would be great. And for now, thanks for listening and I hope you'll come back next time. For more Now and Next. I'm Leora Kornfeld.