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WKOW 27 Carl Agnelly

Down to Earth: Car-Free Challenge

Every day for many of us, it's in the car on the road to work, then home, maybe an errand or two mixed in, and repeat. It's a routine the Madison Environmental Group would like us to try to break at Saturday's kickoff to the Car-Free Challenge.

"The Car-Free Challenge pledge is about trying to go car-free for one day, one week, or one month for the die hards," said Sonya Newenhouse with the MEG and Community Car programs.



The challenge snagged Physicians Plus Vice President Kathryn McGowan. She has biked the ten miles between her downtown office and the far west side before. This time she's prepared to go car-free for a full month.

McGowan has stocked a locker in her office building with supplies, like make-up, brush, curling iron, and blow drier. They'll come in handy after she also showers in her office's locker room. McGowan said without that facility in her building, going car-free would be tough. "If I didn't have it, it would be really difficult to pull off riding my bike to work."

You can't go car free without lots of planning. McGowan works on the Square. She's already made sure she won't have to travel to any business meetings that are too far away over the next month.

She also said it's important to pay attention to the weather. "If you going to do this, you really need to have your backup plans. What are you going do on a rainy day?" On those days, she will take a bus, carpool, or hope to bum a ride from co-workers who live near her. It won't violate the car-challenge rules.

Overall, McGowan is ready for a month without an automobile. Newenhouse realizes from experience that not everyone who tries the idea will keep it up. "It takes two to six weeks to change a behavior, that will be a life changing event for them," said Newenhouse.

McGowan said this experiment is less about the environment for her, more about the health benefits, and the fact that she'll get some peace and quiet in her life. "I'm a mother of four, the only time I get private time is when I'm on a bike path," jokes McGowan. "It's purely selfish." She said the ten miles on a bike only takes about 10 more minutes that if she drove because then she'd no longer be responsible for dropping the kids off at school.

Last year, 750 people in Madison signed up for the Car-Free Challenge. It kicks off Saturday near the corner of Pinckney and Mifflin streets from 9a.m. - 11 a.m.