

Shenzhen responds to green call

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THE global call to action on climate change is gathering steam in Shenzhen as a growing number of individuals, businesses, schools and communities have promised to turn off the lights for an hour Saturday.

About 200 residents of the Huangbeiling community in Luohu District gathered in front of a supermarket yesterday to show their support for Wal-Mart's call for a low-carbon lifestyle.

The world's largest retailer has vowed to reduce carbon emissions by shutting down some lights in their stores and outdoor signboard lights during off-peak hours in the next four weeks. It also asked employees and customers to join millions of people in other parts of the world who will turn off the lights at home from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday.

Other retailers, including Carrefour, Jusco, Tesco and Ikea, have also pledged to take part in Earth Hour, the biggest climate awareness campaign yet initiated by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2007.

In addition, a number of banks, including Hang Seng Bank, high-tech firms, such as Shenzhen Chuangtong Intelligence Equipment Co., most schools and star-rated hotels have signed up to do their bit. China Vanke, the country's biggest property developer, sent a message to residents in its 27 residential estates across Shenzhen, asking them to switch off lights at home and join outdoor activities in their communities. Landmark buildings in Shenzhen will join Beijing's Forbidden City and London's Big Ben to black out for an hour.

The city's power supply bureau proposed Monday that all Shenzhen residents to turn off the lights at home for an hour this weekend and think of other ways to reduce emissions.

The city's foreign community is also active. Event organizers like Indonesian Shirley Koval plan to take people out of their homes for networking activities in the dark.

In stark contrast, when Earth Hour first became known in Shenzhen two years ago, it was observed by only three companies and a few dozen individuals.

“The number of individuals and businesses observing Earth Hour has been growing very fast,” Karen Ho, a business engagement leader with WWF’s Hong Kong section, said in Shenzhen yesterday.

About 1 billion people from roughly 6,000 cities across the world are expected to observe Earth Hour this year. About 1.16 million Chinese have signed up to take part in Earth Hour, WWF’s Web site shows.

“Of China’s population of 1.3 billion, about 500 million live in cities and the number is rising,” said Gal Shvitiel, vice president of marketing for Wal-Mart China. “A low-carbon lifestyle is a must for every community and the daily life of each individual.”

Sun Jingfeng, a department chief with the environment commission, yesterday advised residents to do more in their daily lives to protect the environment.

“Individual action can have an unexpected effect on our green cause,” Sun said. “Do small things in daily life, such as avoiding wasting food and taking public transport instead of driving a car, and our globe will become greener.”