



Environment and Climate Change

What is Climate Change?

Climate change is described as a “change in climate (i.e.; regional temperature, precipitation, extreme weather, etc.) caused by [an] increase in the greenhouse effect” (International Energy Agency).

Climate change has the potential to affect the health and well-being of Canadians in a number of ways, including:

- Increased smog and heat waves resulting in more temperature-related illness and death;
- The spread of infectious diseases such as malaria, dengue and yellow fever into Canada as insects carrying these diseases migrate northward with the warming climate;
- The quality and the quantity of drinking water could decline as water sources in some areas become threatened by drought.

The report, "Environment: GHG Emissions Per Capita" (July 2011), ranked Canada "15th out of 17 countries for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per capita, earning Canada a 'D' grade (Conference Board on Canada).

How Are Aboriginal People Impacted by Climate Change?

- Increased incidences of respiratory stress in association with summer temperature extremes that now exceed 30°C in Canada’s Northern communities (Furgal et al., 2002).
- Increase in the “number and species of biting flies and insects, including bees. Residents in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) are “concerned because of the potential for spread of disease or potential allergic reactions to stings, as many of these insects have never been seen before in this region” (Furgal et al., 2002).
- Changes to ice due to warmer weather (impacts hunting and fishing, winter roads useable for a shorter time-period) (Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, 2006).
- The shortened winter hauling season “exacerbates housing shortages in northern communities since many construction materials can only be transported overland” (The Canadian Press, 2012).
- Supplies such as groceries, fuel and construction materials are scarce and expensive in remote communities (The Canadian Press, 2012).
- Increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather events and forest fires.

What are Some Factors that Contribute to Climate Change?

- The burning of fossil fuels (the energy used to drive vehicles, power equipment, and heat homes is responsible for 75% of the greenhouse gases emitted in Canada) (Halton Region).
- The conversion of land for forestry and agriculture.
- The treatment and pumping of water and wastewater account for about 3% of greenhouse gases (Halton Region).

What are the Relevant Pieces of Legislation that Address Pollution and Climate Change?

The **Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA)** is the principal Act for the regulation of environmental contaminants. The CEPA grants the federal government authority “to regulate and control substances through national quality objectives, guidelines and/or standards” (Health Canada). Ontario's **Environmental Protection Act (EPA)** is the primary pollution control legislation in Ontario. The EPA legislation prohibits “discharge of any contaminants in to the environment that cause or are likely to cause adverse effects” (North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority.).

The **Kyoto Protocol** is a protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the major feature of the “Kyoto Protocol is that it sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) (a gas in the atmosphere that absorbs and emits radiation) emissions” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The protocol was ratified in Canada in 2002, but in 2011, the Ministry of the Environment’s Peter Kent announced Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Accord.

The **Species At-Risk Act (SARA)** was enacted in 2002. The Species At-Risk Act (SARA) recognizes the significant role of Aboriginal peoples by “explicitly acknowledging First Nations knowledge and the unique relationship with lands, waters, plants and animals” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). As Aboriginal people, we must take a leadership role in ensuring the well-being of the species of plants and animals that sustain us as a people. As Aboriginal peoples we view all things as living. Therefore, when you look at the role of Aboriginal peoples within the environment our traditional roles prescribe:

- Respect for all creation;
- Self-Management, not to waste and only take what you need;
- Offerings, are given before taking from the land out of respect and to give thanks for the gifts;
- All our relations, we consider all creation within a family context;

What Can I do on a Local Level to Foster Awareness Regarding Climate Change?

- Ensure that the federal/provincial governments continue to respect the inherent Treaty Rights of First Nation communities to be consulted and accommodated when environmental projects and strategies are proposed; Address the infringement of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights by federal and provincial legislation;

- Continue to advocate for the strengthening of the Canada Environmental Protection Act and other legislation to your local MP and MPP;
- Get involved in tree planting and urban agriculture projects like community gardens;
- Raise awareness of environmental issues through print, video and social media;
- Establish composting and recycling programs which can minimize the amount of waste in landfills, resulting in healthier environments for our communities.

References

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