

review

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY

NRTEE Launches Its Millennium Program in Halifax

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) has embarked on a year-long process to identify issues that are likely to be most important to Canada's environment and economy for the first decade of the new millennium.

As the new millennium approaches, Canada will face multiple challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. Some problems and solutions will be uniquely Canadian, but most will have regional and international dimensions. Given the complexity of the issues and conflicting views from different sectors of society, it is not surprising that decision makers and the public often find it difficult to respond appropriately. Deciding where to act has become a major policy challenge.

The NRTEE is addressing this challenge directly by exploring the sustainability issues of top-most importance to Canada and proposing priorities for action by policy and decision makers in government, industry, labour and the environmental movement. Each National

Round Table plenary over the next year will concentrate on a theme. The first theme to be examined was the environment and health, which was the focus of the Halifax plenary, August 4-6, 1999. The other themes and dates will be:

Thursday, November 4, 1999 – Toronto, ON
Public Workshop on the Economy & Jobs in the New Millennium

Thursday, February 3, 2000 – Calgary, AB

Public Workshop on the Preservation of Nature in the New Millennium

Thursday, May 4, 2000 – Montreal, QC

Public Workshop on Urban Livability in the New Millennium

Location and speakers will be announced closer to the date of each workshop.

In conjunction with the Halifax plenary, a workshop entitled *Emerging Health and Environment Issues for the New Millennium* was co-sponsored with the Nova Scotia Community College. The workshop explored emerging challenges and concerns in the environment and health area.

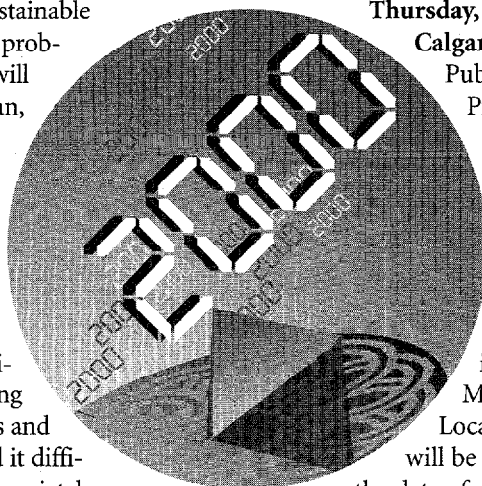
Millennium Program cont. on page 2

Health, Environment and the Economy Program: Searching for a Balance

The NRTEE's Health, Environment and the Economy program is currently examining the decision-making processes used to protect human health from possible environmental threats. However, rather than focus on a particular contaminant and/or a particular means by which humans are exposed to pollutants (e.g., water, air), the NRTEE is examining ways in which the process of decision making can be improved to better reflect a balance between health, environment and economy considerations. The issues that will be examined include;

- how scientific data is used in decision making and what happens when a definitive conclusion from existing data does not exist;
- what roles economic and social factors have in the environmental health decision-making process and whether the costs and benefits should be quantified;
- how to include a wider range of stakeholders, including the general public; and

Health, Environment and the Economy Program cont. on page 2



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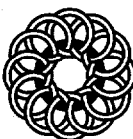


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The workshop featured the following speakers:

- Dr. Judy Guernsey, *Assistant Professor, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, Dalhousie University*. Dr. Guernsey's work has focused on environmental and occupational epidemiology and its application to global ecosystem health.
- Dr. Donna Mergler, *Director of CINBIOSE, Université du Québec à Montréal*. Dr. Mergler has spent over 28 years researching and teaching on the effects of toxic substances on the central nervous system and on the effects of working conditions on workers' health.
- Mr. Frank Metzger, *President of the Nova Scotia Allergy and Environmental Health Association and Director of Marketing and Sales Worldwide, EIN Publishing*. Mr. Metzger is the President of the Nova Scotia Allergy and Environmental Health Association, a non-profit organization concerned with environmental illness and related issues.
- Dr. Colin Soskolne, *Professor, Department of Public Health Science, University of Alberta and recently returned from the World Health Organization*. Dr. Soskolne has recently returned from a year sabbatical leave as Visiting Scientist with the World Health Organization, where he organized "Global Ecological Integrity: Implications of 'Sustainable Development' for Human Health," a workshop that addressed concerns about reports of collapsing life support (which includes climate change) and the implications for human health.

The plenary in August 2000 will integrate all of the findings and conclusions from the previous meetings, and the final report will be released shortly thereafter. ●

- whether other approaches such as the "precautionary principle" should be used. (The Rio Declaration of 1992 defines the precautionary principle as follows: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent degradation.")

These issues form the framework within which four case studies will be examined.

Particular emphasis will be given to the decision-making process in each case in an effort to understand why and how certain decisions were reached. The four case studies that will be examined are the following:

CASE #1 - Lindane:

Lindane is a persistent organic pollutant (POP), a type of substance that accumulates over time in the fatty tissues of animals and humans, particularly in northern regions, far from their original site of use. Faced with studies that show accumulated depositions of lindane and other POPs in their traditional foods, northern Aboriginal communities such as the Inuit are wondering whether they should be modifying their diet.

CASE #2 - Low-sulphur fuel regulations:

Earlier this summer Environment Minister Christine Stewart announced that the level of sulphur in gasoline will be reduced by more than 90% by 2005. Sulphur occurs naturally in petroleum products and causes increased emissions of sulphur dioxide and sulphate particles, both of which contribute to air pollution. Sulphur also decreases the efficiency of emission control systems in vehicles, resulting in higher emissions of other pollutants such as carbon monoxide, oxides

of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds. This case study will examine the decision-making process that led to this decision, including the Government Working Group and in particular, how this group used health, environmental and economic factors (such as the cost of retrofitting Canadian refineries).

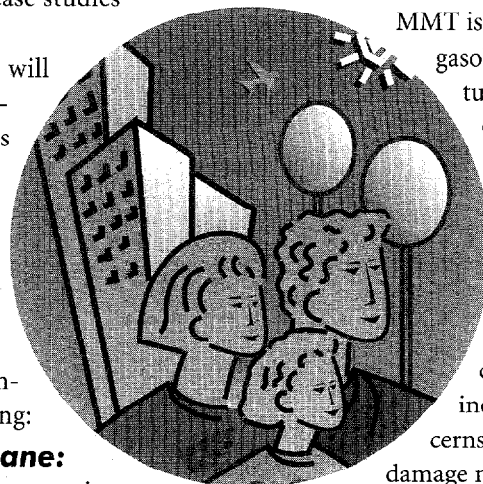
CASE #3 - The Canadian government's attempted ban on the trade of MMT:

MMT is a manganese-based gasoline additive manufactured by the Ethyl Corporation of the United States. In June 1997, the federal government banned the importation and provincial transportation of MMT, citing several issues including health concerns (manganese is said to damage neurological function-

ing) and the claim from vehicle manufacturers that MMT causes spark plugs to misfire and interferes with the emissions control diagnostic systems. However, after Ethyl Corporation opposed the ban through an appeal to the NAFTA, the federal government rescinded the ban and paid damages to the company. This case study will examine the potential limitations to acting on the precautionary principle, the adequacy of scientific data for policy making and the issue of risk management in the face of scientific uncertainty.

CASE #4 - Bovine hormone Revelor h:

Revelor h, a bovine growth hormone, is a synthetic product intended to improve beef production. Despite its approval in both Canada and the United States, health concerns still remain regarding beef hormones in particular and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in general.

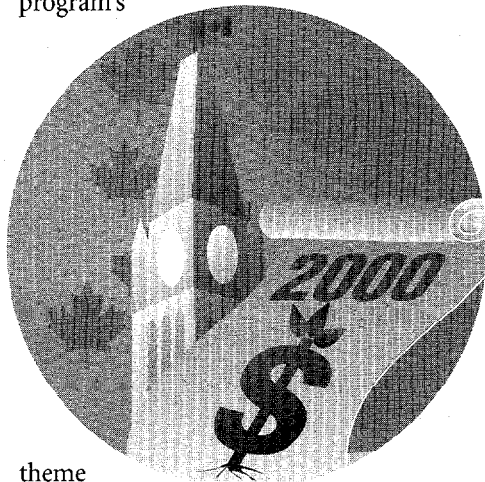


Program Updates

Economic Instruments

Greening the Budget

The NRTEE hosted a Greening the Budget multistakeholder workshop in Toronto on June 22, 1999, confirming the program's



theme of the "legacy" left to Canada's children. Building upon the federal government's recent work on education, health and knowledge-based capacity building, and in line with its priorities of a stronger economy and a stronger society, the NRTEE will recommend that the "Legacy Budget" include initiatives for community, economic and ecological well-being. The workshop participants selected several initiatives within these three sub-themes for further research, development and testing. Over the summer months the NRTEE will be building upon these ideas.

The NRTEE anticipates delivering final recommendations to Finance Canada in September 1999.

Contact: *Elizabeth Atkinson* (613) 943-0394

Aboriginal Communities and Non-Renewable Resource Development

The North represents Canada's final frontier: host to the country's last major untapped continental reserves of raw natural resources, traditional economies and environments. The need to ensure that future development occurs in a sustainable manner (accommodating industry's concerns and the economic development, capacity-building and cultural concerns of Aboriginal communities, as

well as ensuring the protection of the environment) is imperative.

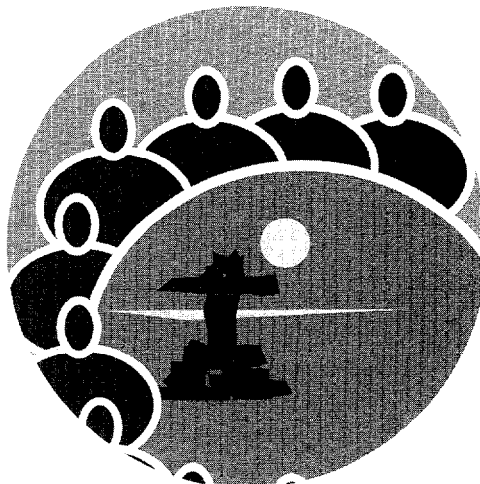
The goal of the program is to identify the essential components of a process to guide non-renewable resource development over the next 10 to 25 years that balances the economic, environmental and social interests of industries, Aboriginal communities, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and governments located in Canada's North.

The objectives of the program are:

- to determine the magnitude of opportunity that non-renewable resource development presents for the N.W.T. over the next several decades;
- to gain a better understanding of the current state of policy in the N.W.T. by identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and provide recommendations for further improvement;
- to demonstrate the costly price tag associated with the unsustainable development of non-renewable resources by examining the "legacy of liability";
- to ensure that non-renewable resource development contributes to economic diversification, environmental protection and social issues through fiscal and tax provisions;
- to strengthen partnerships between

Aboriginal communities, industry, ENGOS, and federal and territorial governments by ensuring open discussion on how the development should proceed over the next 25 years; and

- to raise the profile of this issue by developing and disseminating information.



The NRTEE will continue to promote awareness of the program with stakeholders throughout the fall, and will host a multistakeholder forum in late January 2000.

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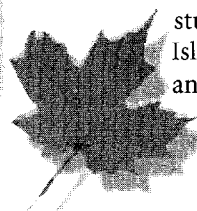
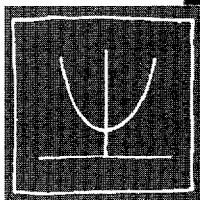
LEAD Canada

Twelve new Associates have joined LEAD Canada's latest training group, Cohort 8. Cohort 8 Associates represent seven provinces and territories and are drawn from organizations such as The Na na kila Institute, Noranda, Women's World Bank, ONYX Industries, Lotek Marine Technologies Inc., Enviroscope, the Privy Council Office, the Kivalliq Divisional Education Council and the Sustainable Development Research Institute. Cohort 8 will begin its two-year training session in October.

As well, the LEAD Canada Secretariat is currently working closely with LEAD International to plan Cohort 7's final international training

session, which will be held in Canada for the first time. The session is tentatively scheduled

for Vancouver, and will include case studies on Vancouver Island, at Whistler, B.C. and in Yellowknife, N.W.T.



Health, Environment and the Economy Program *cont. from page 2*

In 1996, Canada and the U.S. challenged the European Union's (EU) decision to ban North American beef that had been raised with the use of hormones, basing the claim on health concerns. The World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled against the EU in 1998, stating there was no scientific basis for the ban. This case study will examine the debate on how to deal with the concern of health impacts from the consumption of GMOs, the labelling of GMO foods to aid consumer choice, and the role of international regulatory organizations such as the WTO.

Once the case studies are developed, they will be used as a springboard to help formulate useful recommendations. The goal is

not to criticize the decisions that are featured in the case studies, but to use the lessons learned from past experiences in order to help formulate improvements in future policy processes.

This work will be initiated at a multi-stakeholder workshop in Ottawa on November 18-19, 1999. After the workshop, these recommendations will be further researched and will form the basis of the final program report that will be released next year.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Carolyn Cahill, NRTEE Policy Advisor at (613) 996-4501, or by e-mail at cahillc@nrtee-trnee.ca.

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Goes Electronic

The NRTEE newsletter, *Review*, will soon be available via e-mail. Please let us know if you would like your name added to our electronic mailing list: admin@nrtee-trnee.ca.

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