



36080720

# Are you environmentally aware?



Public opinion polls indicate that people think of the environment as something invisible, "out there", and generally do not feel responsible for it. How do you perceive it? The reality is that we are an integral part of the environment and everything that we all do in our everyday lives affects it, and consequently, us. Individual decisions about our lifestyles, the economic productivity and sustainability of our resources, all lead to activities that affect our environment.

## Our Chemical Dependency

Our society today is very dependent on the use of chemicals to enhance and maintain a certain standard of living. However, in producing and protecting what we need and want, we do pay a price, especially when we use the environment as a waste receptacle. News about environmental problems gets grimmer everyday: acid rain is killing lakes, some pesticides could be hazardous to human health, chemicals are contaminating our drinking water... but, do we realize how we, as consumers, are contributing to the creation of such problems?

## Benefits vs. Risks

The benefits of using a product are immediate and obvious: dandelions disappear from lawns, roses and other flowers bloom under protection, tomatoes and other vegetables grow healthy and unblemished, mosquitoes and other pests are wiped out of existence, interiors of homes are cleaned, protected, polished and maintained — all through the use of chemicals. But, do you know how these chemicals can change the environment?

Though all the consequences of the use of chemicals are not completely known or understood, it is generally recognized that the potential for adverse environmental impacts exists. However, the side effects experienced both from proper or improper use of a product are generally disregarded by most users. That could perhaps be either from a lack of knowledge of the harm done, for side effects are subtle and take some time to show, or a compromise in order to savour the benefits of use. As a matter of prudence, we all must strive to minimize adverse effects on the environment.

## Consumer Awareness

### — The Key to a Healthier Environment

As a consumer, you should look for both product and environmental quality. Besides, there are many things

you can do to protect and maintain the health and diversity of our ecosystems. For instance, air pollutants are reduced by 5 to 10 per cent by better maintenance of automobiles; consumer purchases are 10 per cent of total sales of pesticides — consider using non-chemical alternatives where possible; consumer sorting of household waste is essential to the success of recycling.

## Managing Chemicals Better

In view of the concerns that have become evident about environmental contamination, the federal government has devised a management strategy which aims at complementing remedial activities with actions of a preventive nature. Its objective is to ensure that human activities are conducted in a way that will achieve and maintain a state of environment necessary for the health and well-being of mankind, and the health and the diversity of species and the ecosystems, and the sustained use of natural resources for economic and social benefit.

## We Are All Responsible

However, the responsibility of looking after the environment does not belong to the government alone — the individual, as a consumer, is responsible too. We are all involved, both directly through the use of products, and indirectly, by being the retail customers of industrial firms. So, we all have to work together to protect our environment. To be a part of the solution, consumers must recognize that they are also a part of the problem.

It is not difficult to live in harmony with the environment — all it requires is an awareness of the consequences of our actions, and a willingness to change in order to protect and conserve the quality of the environment.

## For more information, contact:

Environment Canada  
Information and Public Relations  
1141, route de l'Église  
Sainte-Foy (Québec)  
G1V 4H5