



*Environmental
Assessment
is Good Business*



Federal Environmental
Assessment Review Office

Bureau fédéral d'examen
des évaluations environnementales

AN IMPORTANT MANAGEMENT TOOL

Business and governments have an important planning and decision-making tool in the pursuit of sustainable development — environmental assessment.

Environmental assessment is a systematic process used to help make decisions that take into account the impacts of human activities on the environment. The process helps factor environmental effects into project proposals, policies and programs — much the same way as cost, resources and labour are considered.

The process involves an assessment of the potential impacts of a proposed project, policy or program on the ecosystem — the air, water, land and living organisms. A study of the socio-economic impacts on affected human populations is also included. Such assessments provide a solid basis for limiting or eliminating environmental effects and for making decisions.

By integrating environmental factors, public concerns and community values early in the decision-making process, business and governments can make timely decisions on projects.

Environmental assessment provides a forum to discuss the large and growing public concerns about environment and health. In turn, the process helps business and governments to meet their responsibilities for the environment and to earn public confidence.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

An environmental assessment begins early in the planning stages of a proposed policy, program or project. It is completed before the policy or program is implemented or construction of the project begins.

While the decision-making process itself may vary depending on the country, state or province, region or municipality, environmental assessments generally follow similar steps. (To simplify our description, we will apply the process to projects.)

The process starts with an effort to understand the potential environmental effects of a project. Some of the typical questions raised at this stage include: What is the environmental setting of the proposed project? What natural resources will be needed? What waste will the project produce? Will the project increase the load of toxic substances in the air or water? Will plants, fish and wildlife be affected? Will communities be disturbed? If there are effects, can they be avoided, limited or contained? If so, how and with what actions? What benefits will the project bring to the environment and to the community?

The process may then look at options. Are there alternatives with lesser impacts that would achieve a similar purpose? How do the options compare over time?

Once the options are refined and reviewed in light of public, scientific and other expert input, recommendations are made to the responsible authorities. A decision is then taken on whether to proceed with the project and how, if the project is approved. The recommendations from the environmental assessment process serve as a solid basis for monitoring and follow-up plans.

Environmental assessments — large or small, formal or informal — empower decision makers to make practical, responsible and informed choices.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT IS GOOD PLANNING

Good environmental assessment is good management, and good management is good business.

- **The environmental assessment process promotes better planning.** The scrutiny of a project and its alternatives through environmental assessment leads to a more effective and efficient project.
- **The process saves time and money in the long run.** By integrating environmental factors in decision-making at the planning stage, business and governments avoid expensive and sometimes controversial remedial action afterwards.
- **The process facilitates investment.** Conducting an environmental assessment facilitates the gathering of information now required by financial and other institutions that loan money or make investment decisions for major developments. In addition, the process can help long-term investments by determining how resources can best be managed over the longer term.
- **It keeps business and governments in touch.** Input through public consultation, before plans are finalized and investments made, can improve community relations and ensure dollars are well invested.
- **As a good management practice, environmental assessments can support future prosperity.** Through decisions based on recommendations from the process, there can be more prudent use of resources and a reduction of environmental threats to human health and ecosystems.

- **Environmental assessment leads to responsible decisions.** Responsible decisions, in turn, are good for investment, good for the health of the organization, its employees and the community where it operates. As well, responsible decisions sustain and enhance the value of the environment we pass on to future generations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Environmental assessment is a planning and decision-making tool. By following a few steps any organization can apply environmental assessments to ensure that the best possible decisions are made.

Here are some steps you can take to improve your decisions:

- **Be informed.** Develop a good knowledge base about the environment and the environmental effects of your projects as well as the principles and methods of environmental assessment. Understand the environmental assessment laws and processes that apply to your organization and its operations.
- **Make environmental considerations a priority.** Establish environmental assessment as part of the policies, procedures and day-to-day practice throughout your organization.
- **Assess your decisions, policies and activities for their impact on the environment.** This will strengthen the investment and development decisions taken by your organization.

- **Establish stronger links with stakeholders - undertake consultations.** Greater communications will build a better understanding of community concerns and keep corporate goals current.
- **Integrate community values and concerns along with scientific and technical information in decision-making.**
- **Monitor and evaluate your projects.** Follow up on your environmental assessments to determine the effectiveness of your predictions or measures taken to reduce environmental effects. Use this information to improve your practice of environmental assessment.

REFORMING THE FEDERAL PROCESS

The Government of Canada is introducing a new environmental assessment process - the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act which will improve a process that has existed since 1974. The government has also implemented new measures to ensure that policy proposals include assessments of environmental impacts.

The Act prescribes a clear and legally precise process for projects requiring a decision by the Government of Canada. This includes federal projects, as well as projects involving federal funding, lands or regulation.

Here are a few features of the new process:

- The process is administered before a federal decision can be taken to proceed with a project.
- In order to facilitate decisions on projects posing the greatest environmental risk, project proposals are streamlined into categories.
- The Act provides for joint review panels to reduce duplication and promote cooperation between different levels of government.

- Mediation is an alternative or complement to a review by a public panel.
- Because concern for the environment, and responsibility for its protection, are shared by governments, business and the public, the new process includes significant provisions for public involvement.
- To ensure plans to limit or eliminate potential environmental harm are effective, proponents are required to prepare follow-up and monitoring plans.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is an expression of the Government of Canada's commitment to a healthy and competitive future.

March 1992

For additional information on the Canadian environmental assessment process, please complete the coupon below and send it by mail or FAX to :

Federal Environmental Assessment
Review Office
200 Sacré-Coeur Blvd., 13th Floor
Hull, Quebec, CANADA
K1A 0H3
Tel. 819-997-1000 / FAX 819-994-1469

NAME	_____
TITLE	_____
AFFILIATION	_____
ADDRESS	_____
TELEPHONE	_____
FAX	_____

Published by authority of the Minister of the Environment
© Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1992
Cat. No. EN106-18/1992
ISBN 0-662-58883-5