

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Addressing the interconnection between human health and environmental degradation is at the core of achieving sustainable development. The relationship between health and environment has been a key consideration during the international preparatory process leading up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and has been an important part of Canadian preparations.

Environmental degradation is recognized as a contributor to many of the leading causes of illness, hospitalization and death worldwide. Canadians, like others, face health risks from environmental threats originating from inside and outside our borders. These threats affect the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil in which we grow our food. This is also true of activities within Canada that can affect the environment and health of people living elsewhere. Shared concerns, such as the long-range transport of air pollution, including mercury and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the international movement of hazardous



waste, global climate change and depletion of the ozone layer, all point to the need for partnerships to achieve sustainable development.

Canada has played a leadership role in promoting greater cooperation between health and environment through numerous international events. In March 2002, Canada hosted the first Meeting of Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas (HEMA). HEMA participants identified several areas requiring action, including integrating water resources management, improving air quality, addressing the health implications of natural and human-made disasters, improving chemicals management,

identifying potential health impacts of climate variability and climate change, tackling challenges to occupational health, food security and safety, and promoting the ethics of sustainable development. The HEMA meeting is one example of how we are advancing sustainable development in the Americas.

Canada also hosted the 2002 G8 Environment Ministers Meeting in April where a key issue of discussion was the relationship between health and environment. Discussions included a status report on implementing the 1997 Declaration on Children's Environmental Health. The Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation was held in Ottawa in June 2002 and a cooperative agenda to protect children's health from environmental threats was launched.

Tackling environmental threats to human health requires sharing the most reliable information and capacity building at the local, national, regional and international levels. Canada is working with a number of partners on a proposed initiative entitled, *Health and Environment Linkages: From Knowledge to Action*. The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration on health and environment issues through a synthesis and application of existing knowledge in order to improve the ability to address environmental threats to human health. Discussions to shape the initiative will continue throughout the WSSD.

Protecting vulnerable populations such as children and Aboriginal peoples is a priority for Canada as it determines what further actions are required to improve human health and the environment.

For more information about Canada at the WSSD, consult Canada's World Summit Web site at www.wssd-smdd.gc.ca.

