

The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA 1999)

October 2005

CEPA 1999 at a Glance

What it is, what it does, how it works

The health of Canadians and our economic and social progress are fundamentally linked to the quality of our environment. Recognizing this, the Government of Canada's environmental policies, under the banner of Project Green, are linked with economic and market realities so that Canadians have a cleaner, healthier environment and continued economic growth. The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* is one of the Government of Canada's primary tools for achieving sustainable development and pollution prevention — the goals set out through Project Green.

This info-sheet is part of a series of three that provides an overview of CEPA 1999. *CEPA 1999 at a Glance* presents a brief introduction to the Act. The others in the series outline the main issues addressed by the Act — *CEPA 1999: Focus on Issues*, and the key processes employed — *CEPA 1999: The Management Process*.



The principal federal legislative tool for preventing pollution

In Canada, the federal government, as well as provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments, share responsibility for protecting the environment — an approach that calls for close collaboration as governments work to support the well-being of Canadians. As a cornerstone of the Government of Canada's environmental legislation, CEPA 1999 is aimed at preventing pollution and protecting the environment and human health.

■ *A focus on harmful substances*

One of CEPA 1999's major thrusts is the prevention and management of risks posed by harmful substances. As well, CEPA 1999 provides for the assessment and/or management of the environmental and human health impacts of new and existing substances. This includes products of biotechnology, marine pollution, disposal at sea, vehicle, engine and equipment emissions, fuels, hazardous wastes, environmental emergencies and other sources of pollution.

■ *A comprehensive approach to respond to complex challenges*

CEPA 1999 is a major legislative initiative guided by a set of principles that ensure consistent approaches (see sidebar, next page) for achieving clear objectives to:

- contribute to sustainable development by *preventing pollution*;
- promote coordinated action with provinces, territories, Aboriginal governments, and federal departments *to achieve the highest level of environmental quality for the health of Canadians*; and
- manage risks from harmful substances and *virtually eliminate releases of those substances determined to be the most dangerous*.

Together, these objectives and guiding principles provide powerful guidance for the work of the Government of Canada, as well as for collaborative work and consultations with the public. The Act also includes requirements for monitoring, reporting and research.

■ *At the helm ...*

The Minister of the Environment is accountable to Parliament for the administration of all of CEPA 1999. Both the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Health jointly administer the task of assessing and managing the risks associated with existing and new substances. The Minister of Health is required to conduct research on the role of substances in illnesses and health problems.

Sustainable Development

CEPA 1999 contributes to sustainable development, which means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.



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■ Part of a bigger legislative picture

Work carried out under CEPA 1999 is complemented by other federal Acts administered (fully or partially) by the Minister of the Environment for example, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Canada Water Act*, the *Species at Risk Act*, the *Canada Wildlife Act*, and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. Additionally, some specialized acts administered by other federal departments are used to control, among other things, pesticides, fertilizers and the introduction of certain products of biotechnology into the Canadian market so that risks to the environment and human health are reduced or prevented.

CEPA 1999 Guiding Principles

Work under CEPA 1999 is guided by principles that contribute to and reinforce the importance of:

Sustainable development — development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Pollution prevention — the use of processes, practices, materials, products, substances or energy that avoid or minimize the creation of pollutants or waste and reduce the overall risk to the environment and human health.

Virtual elimination — ensuring that releases into the environment of non-naturally occurring, persistent (meaning they take a long time to break down) and bioaccumulative substances (meaning they collect in living organisms) resulting from human activity are reduced to extremely low levels.

Ecosystem approach — reflecting the dynamic interrelationships between living organisms (plant, animal and microorganism communities) and their non-living environment.

Precautionary principle — where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty will not postpone cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Intergovernmental cooperation — recognition that all governments in Canada face environmental problems that can benefit from cooperative resolution.

Polluter-pays principle — producers and users of harmful substances, pollutants and wastes have a responsibility for bearing the costs associated with the safe use and disposal of these substances and wastes.

Science-based decision making — decisions based on scientific information and traditional Aboriginal knowledge (where available), using a weight of evidence approach along with the application of the precautionary principle, where necessary.

CEPA 1999 is among the best of the world's environmental protection legislation. It represents an important contribution to sustainable development in Canada, and serves to protect Canada's environment and the health of Canadians.

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