

# **Sustainable Development Strategy**

## **Veterans Affairs**

**2001-2004**



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## Minister's Message:



I am very pleased to present to Parliament and the people of Canada the 2001-04 Sustainable Development Strategy for the Veterans Affairs (VA) Portfolio.

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the quality of life enjoyed by Canadians is among the best in the world. To maintain and enhance this quality of life for our children and the generations that follow, we must continue our efforts to green our environment and to assure that sustainability is a major consideration when making our day to day personal, business and government decisions.

During the past three years, the Veterans Affairs Portfolio has made good progress in achieving the goals contained in its 1997 Sustainable Development Strategy. Procurement and fleet policies are in place. Paper utilization is being addressed and clean technologies such as video conferencing are being utilized. Environmental partnerships have been formed with other government departments and provincial and municipal organizations. Finally, work also has begun to better integrate the principles of environmental sustainability into our planning and day to day operations.

In the 2001-04 period covered by this, our second Sustainable Development Strategy, the Veterans Affairs Portfolio will continue to build on this firm foundation, contributing to the Government's goal of making itself a model of environmental excellence. We will continue to reduce our waste and utilization of water and energy. We also will enhance the environmental soundness of our operations as new technologies become available. Special attention will be paid to integrating sustainable development considerations into our Portfolio's policies, programs and operations. Our focus each day will be to maintain the quality of life and health of our clients and staff, and to sustain among our citizens an understanding of the horrors of war and the nation building significance of the achievements and sacrifices of Canadians during periods of armed conflict and peacekeeping.

Our second Sustainable Development Strategy also attempts to improve the measurement of the Portfolio's progress against its plans. It contains an environmental management framework, measurable goals and an evaluation schedule. However, in the fullness of time, the most important measurement of our sustainable development success will be the judgement of our future generations. If from the future they look back on our actions today, and conclude that we met our needs without compromising their ability to meet their needs, then we will have succeeded.

The Honourable Ron J. Duhamel

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ron J. Duhamel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Minister of Veterans Affairs  
and Secretary of State  
(Western Economic Diversification)  
(Francophonie)

## Highlights:

The Portfolio's 2001-04 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) identifies concrete objectives, targets and milestones that are organized under four themes:

- < Sustaining Our Government Operations
- < Sustaining Knowledge and Information
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Clients
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Staff

This SDS was developed in parallel with the Veterans' Affairs 2001-2006 Strategic Plan. It reflects a detailed review of the Department's current and anticipated operating environment that included consultations with our clients, our staff, stakeholders and other government departments.

Some of the sustainable development (SD) issues that this Plan attempts to address are:

- < the sometimes tenuous cause and effect relationship between sustainable development initiatives and outcomes;
- < the use of partnerships to deliver health and commemoration services with greater effect and fewer resources;
- < the dilemma posed by imprecise measurements of SD outcomes, even within strengthened accountability cultures and structures;
- < the vital role of training and awareness in the accomplishment of sustainable development objectives;
- < the challenge of integrating sustainable development into policy development and decision making;
- < the responsibility of sustaining the memory and knowledge of Canada's roles in wars and military conflicts, their social and ecological costs, and the honour due Canadians who served in the defence of freedom;
- < the efforts of sustaining the health and quality of life of our clients through health promotion programs that conserve life and utilize fewer resources;
- < the linkages among a family friendly workplace, the health of our staff and the efficient delivery of services to our clients; and
- < changes to address the requirements of our changing clientele.

The Department has made a special effort in this Plan to confine our initiatives to those that are specific and for which we have clear accountability. The Plan also contains an annual review / assessment process, assuring that it remains linked to our strategic planning, that its often challenging targets and milestones are monitored annually, and that it evolves throughout the three year period in response to our operating environment.

## Background:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is not a new idea, but instead, a recently rediscovered idea. Throughout most of human history we have understood the importance of living in harmony with our environment. This harmony was an integral part of ancient history and more recently was a central element of aboriginal culture in North America. With the advent of industrialization, however, the importance of living in harmony with our environment took a back seat to development. Only in the last five decades have we begun to rediscover the importance of sustainable development in the survival of all species sharing this planet.

One of the first advocates of this rediscovery was Mahatma Ghandi who warned, “Understand that there is enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.” Much later, in 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) coined the term sustainable development, and acknowledged that while continued development was essential to meet basic human needs, in terms of our environment, health, society, culture and economy, development had to be sustainable into the foreseeable future. This same theme was adopted in 1992 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro which issued Agenda 21 (a framework for action on the environment and development) and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

As a signatory of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, Canada committed itself to making progress on sustainable development. To honour these commitments, the Federal Government, in 1995 published *A Guide to Green Government*, exploring the concept of sustainable development. The Guide identified three key elements:

- < reconciling environmental quality, social/cultural development and economic growth to ensure the quality of life;
- < integrating environmental social/cultural and economic factors in decision-making, using the best information available; and
- < being aware of the need to promote equity between the rich and the poor, as well as between different countries and cultures, and among different generations.

In 1995 the Government also indicated its commitment to sustainable development by amending the *Auditor General Act* to provide for the creation of a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in the Office of the Auditor General. The amendments, among other things, required Ministers to table in Parliament, within two years of the coming into force of the amendments, sustainable development strategies (SDSs) that outlined their department’s objectives and plans for action to further sustainable development.



Twenty-eight departments, including Veterans Affairs, tabled their first strategies in December 1997. These strategies were based on the guidelines provided in the government's *Guide to Green Government*, signed by all Ministers in 1995.

One of the Commissioner's primary responsibilities is to monitor and report to Parliament on the extent to which departments are implementing their sustainable development strategies. Since the tabling of the first round of sustainable development strategies, the Commissioner has reported twice to Parliament.

In his May 1998 Report, the Commissioner reviewed these strategies in order to help parliamentarians understand what departments did to meet the legislative requirement. His Report concluded that, while most strategies were consistent with the basic requirements in the *Guide to Green Government*, there were two fundamental shortcomings:

- < The strategies failed to establish clear and measurable targets by which the public could judge whether the strategies were being successfully implemented.
- < The strategies appeared to represent more of a statement of the status quo than a commitment to change.

In a subsequent 1999 report, the Commissioner focused more on implementation of the sustainable development strategies and observed that while many actions had been taken, it did not appear that there were appropriate management practices being applied to strategy implementations within departments. Most recently, the Commissioner released a document outlining his expectations for the second generation of SDSs, in which he emphasized to departments the importance of undertaking an assessment of their first strategy (Appendix B of this document), taking care to plan their 2001-04 SDSs to assure they are clearly linked to the department's overall strategic priorities, and ensuring adequate management systems are in place for implementation.

This 2001-04 Veterans Affairs Portfolio Sustainable Development Strategy undertakes to address these issues raised by the Commissioner and those contained in the Portfolio's own assessment of its 1997-00 Sustainable Development Strategy.

### **Portfolio Profile:**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canadians responded to their country's call for service during the South African War, the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War. Canadians have more recently answered the call to duty in the service of humanity, in a variety of peace enforcement, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations around the world – many of them as hazardous as war service or actually involving service in theatres of war.

Canada's development as an independent country with a unique identity, and its standing as a leading and responsible member of the community of nations, stems in part from the magnitude of

its wartime exploits and the scope of its many achievements as a nation-at-arms. A significant part of its modern identity is associated with pride in Canada's enviable peacekeeping record. However, Canada's unselfish contribution to global peace and security, both as ally and peacekeeping partner, has exacted a terrible price in terms of lives sacrificed, health forfeited, hopes unfulfilled, families bereft and communities decimated by loss.

The Veterans Affairs Portfolio exists in large part, to repay the nation's debt of gratitude and to shoulder its burden of responsibility towards those whose courageous services have bequeathed this legacy of valour, citizenship, nation-building and global stewardship.

The Department's mandate is to provide benefits and services to eligible Canadians who served their country during periods of armed conflict and peacekeeping and to honour their sacrifice and achievements in the defence of freedom. Its principal legislative authority is found in the *Department of Veterans Affairs Act*. Major aspects of its legislative and regulatory mandate can also be found in the listing of 15 other published Acts of Parliament and 30 published sets of regulations and Orders-in-Council.

The mission of the Department is to provide veterans, qualified civilians and their families with the benefits and services to which they are entitled; to promote their well-being and self-sufficiency as participating members of their communities; and to keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

Veterans Affairs clients are drawn from two distinct client populations:

< those belonging to one of the groups of individuals identified in the listing below, who are eligible for or who seek benefits and services under VAC's pensions and allowances or health care programs:

- < Armed Forces and Merchant Navy veterans who served during the First World War, the Second World War or the Korean War;
- < former and current members of the Canadian Forces;
- < certain civilians who are entitled to benefits because of their war-time service;
- < allied veterans who had Canadian pre-war domicile;
- < former and current Royal Canadian Mounted Police members; and
- < survivors and dependents of the foregoing groups.

< the Canadian public and world community who serve as an "audience" or "target group" for commemorative programming.

Work which the Portfolio undertakes on behalf of its clients includes:

***Benefits and Services***

The delivery of benefits and services that contribute to the independence, quality of life and standard of living of Canada's war veterans, eligible Canadian Forces members and former members, qualified civilians and their families in recognition of their sacrifice to the nation.

***Pensions Review and Appeal***

Review and appeal hearings by the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to ensure a fair and adjudicative process for disability pensions and war veterans allowance claims.

***Pensions Advocacy***

The rights of Veterans Affairs clients are protected through professional, legal representation in appealing decisions related to disability pensions and allowances.

***Commemoration***

A knowledgeable Canadian public that recognizes the achievements and sacrifices of Canada's citizens in the defence of freedom and appreciates the historical significance of these accomplishments in the development of Canada as a nation.



In carrying out this work, the Portfolio provides our clients with information, advice, medical examinations, assessment of home care and other needs, access to health care services, referrals, adjudication of claims, benefit administration and redress. Commemoration, trust management, property contracts, funeral and burial grants and veterans insurance are among the special programs provided to clients.

In fiscal year 2000-01 planned spending for the Portfolio is approximately \$2 billion, of which about 98% will be spent on program and service delivery to clients. Full-time equivalent levels in this same period are authorized to a level of 3,433. Staff are deployed throughout a decentralized organization consisting of a Head Office in Charlottetown, the National Capital Office in Ottawa and a network of regional and district offices across Canada. In addition, Veterans Affairs operates a hospital in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec, as well as maintaining battlefield memorials in Europe.

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## Issues Scan:

### Issues Overview

A solid sustainable development strategy must be directly linked to a department's strategic planning process and the strategic priorities that flow from that process. To achieve this end, Veterans Affairs has developed this 2001-04 Sustainable Development Strategy in conjunction with the parallel development of its 2001-06 Departmental Strategic Plan. For our SDS Issues Scan, we have drawn on material used in the preparation of our Departmental Strategic Plan, inclusive of a Situation Overview, an Internal Organizational Assessment and an Operations Environmental Scan, plus relevant results of internal and external consultations. Reviewing this information from a sustainable development perspective has helped us to define our SDS issues.

In addition to seeing the need to develop a synergy between our Departmental Strategic Plan and the Veterans Affairs SDS, we also set out to discuss our sustainable development issues and structure our SDS within a framework that was itself sustainable. That is to say that we wanted to adopt a discussion framework that could be used in future Portfolio Sustainable Development Strategies and would facilitate government-wide comparison of related activities over a period of many years. With this in mind, we selected four themes within which to discuss our issues and to structure related objectives, targets and milestones. These four themes are:

- < Sustaining Our Government Operations
- < Sustaining Knowledge and Information
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Clients
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Staff

Each of these themes is derived from, or inspired by, the Leaders' Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Ottawa on April 4, 2000, and the Government of Canada's eight horizontal sustainable development themes agreed to as a framework for all 2001-04 Sustainable Development Strategies.

#### *The Cause and Effect Issue*

Of VA's four themes, Sustaining Government Operations is the most concrete, in the sense that it lends itself to measures that demonstrate a fairly direct cause and effect linkage between activities and outcomes. In other words, over time, improvements in areas such as green procurement, waste management, fleet management and energy efficiency can be linked back, with reasonable confidence, to departmental initiatives taken in an effort to achieve these improvements.

The remaining three themes involve a "softer" cause and effect linkage between activities and outcomes. For example, Veterans Affairs health promotion activities directed at our clients may indeed have a beneficial effect, but how certain can we be that the improved health or longevity of our clients over many years is significantly attributable to our health promotion efforts rather than other factors that might also contribute to the same outcome. Indeed, how do we ascertain that

our efforts have made any difference? Could other factors outside of the control of Veterans Affairs have been entirely responsible for the improvements? These are what we refer to as “soft” sustainable development activities. The causal effect may be questioned, but nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the activities planned and undertaken will have at least some positive impact, producing improved outcomes. We accept that we may never be able to demonstrate, beyond question, that our efforts are primarily the cause of these outcomes. We do however, have reasonable confidence that our efforts contribute to the outcomes. In a macro sense, this acknowledgement of the difference between our “concrete” sustainable development activities and our “soft” activities is the most fundamental issue evolving from our issues scan.

### *The Partnership Issue*

A second fundamental issue that overarches our four themes is partnerships. Given the complexity of government operations and services, sustainability cannot be accomplished without partnerships. Veterans Affairs is involved in more than 70 partnerships. They help us to deliver seamless services to our clients, conduct operations with fewer resources and share knowledge and information with less duplication of effort. The Portfolio has recently completed a review of its partnerships with a goal of better aligning them with our strategic priorities and reducing workload for our staff. VA has placed special emphasis on working with its service partners to coordinate the delivery of health and commemorative initiatives.

### *The Sustainable Communities Issue*

While “Sustaining Communities” is another theme that emerged from the Leaders’ Forum on Sustainable Development held in Ottawa in April 2000, and one of the federal government’s eight horizontal themes, VA has chosen not to address it in this Sustainable Development Strategy. It is not that the theme does not have application to VA. It does.

However, our Departmental strategic planning process has determined that VA would do best to place priority on this theme after 2006, rather than now. To understand the context and rationale of this approach, one must realize that Veterans Affairs is unique in that it is the only federal government department with its Head Office located in a community outside of the National Capital Region. The decision more than twenty years ago to relocate the VA Head Office from Ottawa to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (PEI), was taken in a deliberate attempt to expand and sustain the economy of Prince Edward Island. A recent socio-economic impact study of this initiative conclusively demonstrates its success, not only economically, but also culturally. The Head Office has taken root in the local community. VA employees donate their skills and time in the local community, in addition to contributing to the provincial economy. They play an active role in the knowledge economy. They contribute to PEI having one of the highest proportions of bilingual populations in Canada. They constitute 5% of the workforce of Charlottetown, which as a proportion of the city’s working population, makes Veterans Affairs more important to employment in Charlottetown than the oil and gas industry is to Calgary. In short, VA employees have become a significant factor in sustaining the culture and economy of Charlottetown. Aware of its



importance to the economy and culture of Prince Edward Island, the Portfolio will continue to participate actively in the social fabric of Charlottetown.

Numerous other sustainable development issues are worthy of discussion, many of which have been drawn from the Department's strategic planning process, but also from our assessment of our 1997-00 SDS and our consultations around this SDS. In preparing our Strategic Plan, Veterans Affairs identified strengths, weaknesses, trends, opportunities and threats that impact our current and future operations. In some instances these same factors also impact our efforts to achieve sustainable government operations. Additional issues are drawn from our assessment of the 1997-00 Veterans Affairs' SDS, presented in Appendix B of this document. Finally, we also conducted internal and external consultations as part of our planning process, the scope of which is outlined in Appendix G of this SDS. What follows is a discussion of sustainable development issues derived from these and related sources.

## **Issues Related to Sustaining Our Government Operations**

### *Accountability and Measurement*

The need to strengthen our accountability culture and structures was identified in our assessments pertaining to the Departmental Five-Year Strategic Plan, the VA 1997-00 SDS Assessment and our Modernizing Comptrollership pilot project being conducted in partnership with Treasury Board Secretariat. In our 2001-04 SDS, this has been addressed in part through our adoption of an Environmental Management System (EMS), the placement of a senior management representative on the Portfolio's Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC), and the commitment of two additional Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) primarily to sustainable development duties. In some instances, however, accountability in government operations is complicated by imperfect measurements of outcomes. For example, SDS targets directed at energy consumption, waste management and conservation in the work place cannot always be measured with attribution to VA as a department or to specific groups of staff and their managers. This is because many VA offices nationally are in facilities shared with other tenants, making it impractical to attribute environmentally related consumption specifically to VA staff as opposed to other tenants from government or the private sector. Even in buildings where VA is the sole tenant, measurement tools and approaches often mean that consumption measurement is done at a macro level, making individual management or work unit accountability not viable economically. As a result, collective accountability for SDS outcomes related to the *Guide to Green Government* most often is the norm.

### *Training and Awareness*

The assessment of Veterans Affairs' first sustainable development strategy identified a lack of sustainable development training as an issue that needed to be addressed in the next SDS. The conclusion was that an environmental management system would only be effective if key staff responsible for its implementation received appropriate training. In addition, there was a recognition that greater sustainable development awareness among all staff was necessary if the

Portfolio was to meet its targets for sustaining government operations.

### *Stewardship Committee*

This committee, formed in 1996-97, includes staff from across the Portfolio whose mandate it is to better integrate the principles of environmental sustainability into our project planning and day-to-day operations. This committee meets on a regular basis to discuss the exchange of information and ideas on environmental and sustainable issues within their jurisdiction. The Environmental Stewardship Committee is chaired by the Environmental Management Systems Officer who reports to the Chief Environmental Officer (CEO), the Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, through the Director, Information Access and Support Services.

### *Fleet Management*

The Portfolio has forty-one vehicles, all of which are traditional gasoline burning. VA is recognized nationally for its strong, well established, national service delivery network, a key component of which is home visits to our clients. Because our counsellors make home visits to clients often located in rural areas where there is no access to pure alternative fuels, it has been impractical for us to purchase an alternative fuel fleet. For the time-frame of this SDS, we are attempting to acquire hybrid vehicles where these can be purchased and where their characteristics meet the operational and safety concerns of our staff.

### *Technology and the Personal Touch*

The accelerated adoption of technology for service delivery is an integral part of the Government On-Line (GOL) initiative nation-wide. GOL offers sustainable development opportunities in the areas of paper consumption and travel reduction. The Portfolio already is an extensive user of video conferencing for operations. This reality, together with our Benefits Redesign Project, scheduled for completion in March 2001, provides a solid technological foundation upon which to construct the additional infrastructure necessary to achieve the goals inherent in GOL. However, in achieving GOL, the Portfolio is determined not to forgo the quality service that we provide to our clients. Results from our client comment cards show that the overall quality of service received was high, with 82.4% describing it as “very good” and 14.2% saying it was “good”. The Portfolio is very aware that an important element contributing to this result is the “hands-on personal touch” of staff dealing with clients face-to-face. In the implementation of GOL we cannot lose sight of this. Our operational reality is that the average age of our clients is 78 and will remain close to this for the duration of this plan. While some of our more senior clients may be comfortable accessing our services electronically, others still prefer the personal touch. Therefore, our approach to GOL and related SDS targets must be balanced. Sustaining the health of our clients requires us to offer our services in whatever forms will most encourage clients to access them. The “personal touch” will remain central to our service delivery even if, on occasion, this requires us to set some environmental targets that are more modest than they otherwise could be if we were to employ technology exclusively.

The advanced technology capabilities within the GOL provide us with effective and efficient opportunities to package and deliver knowledge and information about the achievements and sacrifices of Canada's citizens in the defence of freedom. Our public education and community outreach program has developed and delivered a comprehensive set of multimedia education products to Canadian schools. We have also established a unique online resource, the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, with shared information capabilities made possible through partnerships with National Archives, National Defence, and Canada's Digital Collections, Industry Canada.

### *Ste. Anne's Hospital*

Ste. Anne's Hospital is an institution of 560 beds administered by the Department. VA did not include this institution in the Sustainable Development Strategy of 1997, since the certification



process for provincial hospitals already includes very high environmental requirements. The Hospital has directed Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) to develop an environmental management system, the implementation of which is scheduled in 2001-02. The institution intends to adapt its sustainable development initiatives to match the SDS of the Portfolio.

One of the main objectives of the Hospital, as far as sustainable development is concerned, is the major renovation of its facilities, which are becoming antiquated, and reduce the risks of environmental accidents. Also, the facilities will be in line with federal and provincial standards for a long-term care institution. This way, the Hospital will not lose sight of its primary role which is to take care of the veterans. We are also contemplating the establishment of a partnership with the Province of Quebec in order to offer some services to the civil clients. The global objective is to prioritize the high quality care and services to the veterans while insuring a secure environment adapted to their needs.

### *Health Care Coordination*

The Health Care Coordination Initiative (HCCI) is a partnership of nine departments and agencies formed to minimize inefficiency and duplication in the delivery of health care programs. A model for horizontal management of government operations, the initiative encompasses pharmacy transactions, dental care, vision care, audiology, oxygen therapy and other health care services.

Throughout the duration of this SDS, Veterans Affairs will continue to play a leadership role within HCCI, seeking additional means to sustain government operations.

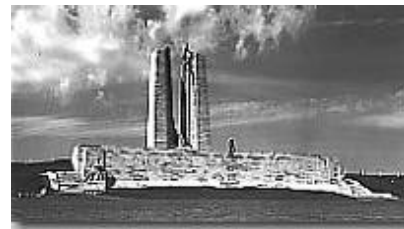
## **Issues Related to Sustaining Knowledge and Information**

### *Commemoration*

The tremendous socio-economic and ecological costs of war and armed conflict are borne through successive generations. Commemorative ceremonies and educational activities heighten



awareness of the price of war and the honour due to those who fought in the defence of freedom. The essence of commemoration is the preservation of peace for our current and future generations. Commemoration also contributes to national unity by strengthening our identity as Canadians. Our Portfolio tackles these sustainability challenges through its programming to all Canadian primary and secondary students and their teachers, and also through its commemorative activities involving the Canadian public at large. During the time frame of our 2001-04 SDS, the Department will expand its delivery of commemorative program information via enhanced multimedia and on-line educational resources. This will be contingent upon the present Commemoration Review Process. These will be developed in partnership with National Archives, National Defence, Industry Canada and the private sector.



### *Integrating Sustainable Development into Policy Development and Decision Making*

Veterans Affairs legislation, policies and programs are generally supportive of sustainable development. However, the Portfolio has recognized that it needs to strengthen its strategic policy development capacity and do a better job of ensuring that sustainable development considerations are integrated into any new policies, programs and activities. Our EMS addresses this issue as it clearly establishes organizational responsibility and accountability for sustainable development in the Portfolio. A major focus of our 2001-04 SDS will be ensuring that all relevant opportunities are explored for making further progress towards integrating environmental, social/cultural and economic factors into the Portfolio's decision making process.

### *Commercializing Dysphagia Research*

Dysphagia is difficulty in swallowing, which inhibits a person's ability to consume solids and liquids. It is a condition often experienced by seniors, and it makes it difficult for caregivers to sustain the health of these seniors. Ste. Anne's Hospital is a national centre of expertise in the production and preparation of therapeutic food products that assist in the treatment of dysphagia and thereby help to sustain the health of Canadians who suffer from the condition. In this SDS the Department, through Ste. Anne's Hospital, will initiate action to seek a private sector partner to commercialize the production and distribution of therapeutic food products it has developed for the treatment of dysphagia.

### **Issues Related to Sustaining the Health of Our Clients**



#### *Promoting Healthy Lifestyles*

Research and case studies from around the world demonstrate that health promotion has a positive impact on individual quality of life. It is a practical approach to achieving greater participation in healthy lifestyles, thereby over the long term sustaining the health of veterans, their

caregivers and their families. To date, the Department has undertaken three pilot health promotion projects designed to address specific needs of veterans and their families using a community-based partnership development approach. During the time frame of our 2001-04 SDS, the Department will expand its health promotion initiatives to encompass subjects such as prevention of falls, home and community safety, medication safety and information access through the Internet. Inherent in this activity will be partnerships with Health Canada, Industry Canada, National Defence, some provinces and the Royal Canadian Legion.

In another partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion, VAC has initiated a project to develop and implement a housing program that will address the current and long-term needs of Canadian veterans and seniors.

#### *Meeting the Expectations of Canadian Armed Forces Veterans*

The needs and concerns of our Canadian Armed Forces veterans can be markedly different than those of our war service veterans. The Department, through a partnership with National Defence, is placing priority on adjusting our VA programs and services so that they better meet the economic and social needs of Canada's modern military personnel and their families, thereby sustaining their well-being. Preliminary findings indicate significant gaps in programs and services for these veterans and their families, reflected in the difficulty that many experience in re-integrating into civilian life on release from the military. In our 2001-04 SDS, the Portfolio will continue to make adjustments to its programs and services so that needs of these Canadian Forces veterans are better understood and addressed. As such, it is anticipated that the satisfaction levels of service expressed by this community will move closer to the satisfaction levels expressed by our war service veterans.

### **Issues Related to Sustaining the Health of Our Staff**

#### *Family Friendly Workplace*

Sustaining the health of our staff is an undertaking that contributes to happy personal lives, while improving productivity and creativity on the job. In recognition of this, and in response to the Federal Government's 1999 Throne Speech commitment to develop a National Children's agenda and promote family friendly environments in federally-regulated workplaces, the Portfolio has sought community partnerships to tackle this challenge. In 2000, representatives of Veterans Affairs, members of a child advocacy community group and other interested parties in Prince Edward Island formed the Family Friendly Workplace Committee.

With the assistance of Dr. Linda Duxbury, an authority on balancing work and family life, and in consultation with employee focus groups, the Committee developed an action plan to bridge the gap between the Department's workplace status quo and the family friendly idea we would like to achieve. The action plan has four main areas of concentration; knowledge, supportive networks, leadership, and the business case. The Committee concluded that staff ultimately are responsible for their own professional and personal lives but that the Committee and its respective

organizations will assist employees in any way possible.

To date, the result is that a significant number of local activities have taken place and many more have been planned to meet employee requests. On the corporate level, the Committee realized that the overarching philosophy and values of the organization have to be communicated and integrated in order to cultivate and sustain a "Family Friendly Workplace". Work is being done to assist managers in converting these values into tangible daily actions. The culture at the workplace can then be supportive of employees in their attempt to balance their personal lives with their work lives.

In addition to the Family Friendly Workplace Initiative, the Portfolio has established and begun work on action plans to address the major issues identified by our staff in the 1999 Public Service Survey. The Family Friendly Workplace Initiative, elimination of harassment and discrimination, workload reduction and improved business processes are all a positive step to Sustaining the Health of our Staff.

### *Career Fulfilment*

A sense of career fulfilment contributes directly to the health of our Veterans Affairs staff. Some employees are content to remain at their level and seek to balance interesting job assignments with an active personal life. Others define career fulfilment as advancement and wish to seek promotions while retaining a quality personal life. The Portfolio's work in response to the 1999 Public Service Survey also addresses this issue through action plans pertaining to fairness in the competitive process and training and development. As in the previous issue, our SDS again attempts to identify and track indicators that may logically be expected to reflect progress in this area.

**Action Plan:**

VA had three primary concerns when formulating its Action Plan for this SDS. The first was to place priority on identifying concrete objectives, targets and milestones. For this reason, the Action Plan is quite specific in actions undertaken and seeks to avoid sustainable development initiatives that might be viewed as so “soft” and general as to be “motherhood” in the eyes of all but a select group of enthusiasts. VA has a real concern that sustainable development not be so broadly defined as to become everything to everybody, and thus border on the meaningless. Another of our primary concerns was to consult fully with our partners in the development of this SDS, but to confine our Action Plan initiatives to those for which VA has clear accountability. Our final concern was to build an annual review/assessment process into our Action Plan so VA can utilize its 2001-04 Sustainable Development Strategy as a document allowing integration into our strategic and operational planning.

Objectives, targets, and milestones contained in the Action Plan have been grouped under four themes:

- < Sustaining Our Government Operations
- < Sustaining Knowledge and Information
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Clients
- < Sustaining the Health of Our Staff

We have developed the targets and milestones of this Action Plan to not only support issues of importance to sustainable development, but to challenge us to go beyond what would be considered to be our normal activities. The accomplishment of all that we have established in our Action Plan will be contingent upon the availability of resources.

**Action Plan**

**Sustaining Our Government Operations:**  
 Our efforts for this theme will focus primarily on the development and fostering of partnerships to improve our provision of services and the preservation and presentation of our physical commemorative resources.

Theme #1 Sustaining Our Government Operations		
Objective	Target	Milestone
Development and implementation of policy, maintenance standards and guidelines for cemeteries	Ensure that all cemeteries are maintained using green products and services	Ensure that contractors involved in graveyard maintenance do so with environmentally responsible products

<b>Theme #1 Sustaining Our Government Operations</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Adoption of pollution prevention approach in the consumption of goods and services	Reduce paper utilization	Completion of a baseline survey to determine the number of printers and photocopiers with the duplexing feature activated where existing contracts allow by June 2001
		Activation of auditrans on all photocopiers by December 2001
		Duplexing of all printing of documents, and correspondence to clients where feasible by March 2002
		Installation and activation of duplex attachments on all printers and photocopiers where contracts allow by March 2002
		Reduction in the number of printers and photocopiers to a 1 to 8 ratio to employee except in special needs areas by March 2002
	Reduce waste	Divert 5.6% of solid waste from landfill per year until March 2004
		Development and implementation of a protocol to use economical alternatives to hazardous materials and/or processes that generate hazardous waste by April 2002
	Manage the fleet in an eco-efficient manner	Purchase of alternate and hybrid fuel vehicles where economically feasible by March 2003
		Completion of arrangements to share vehicles among other organizations by March 2003
		Utilization of the software, Q-tools to determine all vehicle purchases by March 2002

Theme #1 Sustaining Our Government Operations		
Objective	Target	Milestone
		Inclusion of a report on compliance with Treasury Board Motor Vehicle Policy (1996) and the <i>Alternative Fuels Act</i> in all departmental performance reports each year until March 2004
	Promote and encourage green procurement	Creation of a baseline of green purchases as at October 2001
		Utilize fully the AMMIS purchasing system by June 2002
		Increase green procurement by 5% per annum over the March 31, 2001 baseline by March 2004
		Provision of green procurement training to all personnel with purchasing responsibility by March 2004
	Increase energy efficiency	In conjunction with PWGSC, utilization of alternative heating systems, where feasible by December 2003
Assess awareness and training requirements	Develop awareness and training modules	Incorporation of sustainable development and environmental awareness modules into employee orientation packages by April 2001
		Incorporation of sustainable development and environmental awareness modules into the Leadership Learning Program by April 2002
		Provision of sustainable development awareness and training to all staff through presentations at staff meetings by December 2002
Continuous improvement in the provision of health services	Through the cooperation of other federal partners continue to foster improvements on the provision of health services through HCCI initiatives	Establishment of a National Joint Special Equipment Recycling Program by March 31, 2002

<b>Theme #1 Sustaining Our Government Operations</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Promotion of green activities in health care facilities	Integrate environmental stewardship into the decision making process at Ste. Anne's Hospital	Development and implementation of an Environmental Management System by December 2001
Maintainance for future generations of those physical reminders of Canada's wartime experiences as important Canadian cultural resources	Develop management plans and implement best practices which ensure the enduring preservation and presentation of commemorative resources	Inclusion of SD and environmental issues in the assessment of Vimy Monument by March 2002
		To develop new stands for the existing Books of Remembrance and to display a Peacekeepers Book of Remembrance by March 2003
		Inclusion of SD and environmental issues in the ongoing design for Visitors Centre at Vimy by March 2004
		Ensure that the contractors working on the restoration of Vimy purchase products and services that meet environmental specifications by March 2004
		Documentation and presentation of Canada's South African War graves by March 2004
	Implement the Forest Management Plan for Vimy (50 year plan)	Ensure that the SD and environmental issues are identified by March 2002
	Implement the Battlefield Terrain Conservation measures	Ensure that the SD and environmental issues are identified by March 2002

### **Sustaining Knowledge and Information:**

The development and sharing of knowledge and information is showcased through our commitment to integrating sustainable development into our policy and decision making processes therefore allowing us to shape and sustain the social values of the Canadian Public.

<b>Theme #2 Sustaining Knowledge and Information</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Positive development and maintenance of the social values of Canadian youth held in regard to global conflict	Enhance and promote the Canadian Virtual War Memorial (CVWM) through public participation and expanded content development	Provision of public access to CVWM so that Canadians can contribute personal memorabilia on Canada's war dead by March 2002
		Establishment of partnerships with National Archives for on-line publication of service record extract to the CVWM by March 2004
	Develop evaluation criteria	Acquisition of baseline data by March 2002
Minimize deterioration of environmentally sensitive areas within battlefield and memorial sites	Create new multimedia tour products so that visitors can experience the battlefield and memorials via virtual reality	Identification of environmentally sensitive sites and the development of alternative tour modules by March 2004
		Evaluation of products by March 2003
		Acquisition of client data by March 2003
		Review program effectiveness by March 2004
	Establish partnerships with universities and educational institutions	Integration of environmental, social/cultural and economic factors into the establishment of educational credits for Vimy / Beaumont-Hamel experience by March 2002
Sustaining knowledge and information of wars and conflicts for public education purposes	Seek to shape the social values of Canadians relating to global conflict towards more sustainable values	Establishment of guidelines to ensure that contractors purchase products and services that meet environmental specifications for the production and distribution of existing education resource kits on the First World War and the Second World War and the CD-ROM on the Second World War by March 2002



Theme #2 Sustaining Knowledge and Information		
Objective	Target	Milestone
		Establishment of guidelines to ensure that contractors purchase products and services that meet environmental specifications for the production and distribution of "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" education support kit nationally to high schools by March 2002
		Integration of SD and environmental issues within the framework of original research projects of Vimy / Beaumont-Hamel for university credits by March 2003
		Establishment of guidelines to ensure that contractors purchase products and services that meet environmental specifications for completion of the Korean War educational kit by March 2003
Increase awareness of importance of SD to present and future generations.	Establish SD training and awareness that are intrinsic to all areas of training in the Portfolio	Participation in Earth Day and Environmental Week activities
		Development of awareness sessions at staff meetings on an ongoing basis
		Inclusion of SD and environmental issues in staff orientation packages and distribution to all summer student staff and new staff by May 2001
		Provision of VA staff expertise at the community level on issues of SD and of an environmental nature commencing December 2001
Integration of sustainable development into the policy development and decision making processes of the Portfolio	Ensure sustainable development is considered when policies are developed or reviewed	Creation of a SD checklist for policy development and decision making by December 2001

<b>Theme #2 Sustaining Knowledge and Information</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
		Sign off on all new policies by Director General Corporate Planning to ensure that sustainability and environment impacts have been given consideration on all Memorandums to Cabinet commencing April 2001
Dissemination of dysphagic nutritional expertise	Commercialization of therapeutic food production for dysphagic patients	Transfer of technology / knowledge to the private sector, to promote sustainable commercial development of dysphagia treatment and products in Canada by April 2001

### **Sustaining the Health of Our Clients:**

Our activities to advance this theme will be demonstrated through our health promotion and the partnering with the Department of National Defence to facilitate the seamless transition of Canadian Forces veterans to civilian life.

<b>Theme #3 Sustaining the Health of Our Clients</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Education and promotion of healthy lifestyles for all clients	Disseminate health information to clients	Establishment of partnerships with Legions and other government departments by March 31, 2004 to provide access to health information using technology
	Development of programs promoting healthy lifestyles for our clients	Development of health promotion educational information for front line staff that work with Canadian Force (CF) clients by March 2002
		Exploration of joint hearing loss prevention plan development in partnership with other departments by March 31, 2002
		Development of health information, prevention, promotion program in partnership with other departments by March 31, 2002

Theme #3 Sustaining the Health of Our Clients		
Objective	Target	Milestone
		Development of a joint health promotion program on drug use and abuse, in partnership with other departments by March 31, 2002
		Development of an oxygen therapy program in partnership with other departments by March 31, 2003
Increased independence and improved quality of life for veterans, caregivers and other seniors	Deliver a falls prevention program in partnership with Health Canada	Advancement of understanding and knowledge of effective falls prevention interventions directed to veterans by March 31, 2003
		Development of sustainable community resources and supports on falls prevention by March 31, 2004
		Development of the capacity of veterans and other community organizations to develop and deliver sustainable community-based health promotion programs addressing falls prevention by March 31, 2004
		Improved capacity within the two departments to deliver health promotion programming to older Canadians using the population health approach by March 31, 2004
Improve the overall well-being of CF members in support of their transition from military life to civilian life	To adjust and, where appropriate, develop new VA policies, programs and services to meet the needs of the CF clients and their family	Provision of guidance, expert opinion and advice on policy direction, research findings and trends impacting on CF clients, and strategies for implementing and evaluating new policies, programs and models for service delivery to VA through semi-annual meetings of the CF Advisory Council

<b>Theme #3 Sustaining the Health of Our Clients</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
	Raise awareness within the CF community of VA programs, benefits and services	Completion of regular briefing sessions with CF members during orientation sessions with new recruits, at pre- and post-deployment seminars, Second Career Assistance Network seminars, and when other opportunities present themselves
	Provide ongoing support systems for CF members and former members	In concert with Department National Defence (DND), maintenance of the operations of the DND-VA Centre for the Support of Injured and Retired Members and Their Families
		Provision of professional counselling services to qualified CF clients through a VA 1-800 (telephone) Assistance Service
	Modernize benefits for CF members, former members and their families	Preparation of an options paper on the modernizing of benefits by June 2001

### **Sustaining the Health of Our Staff:**

Staff are essential to the provision of service to our clients . Our activities in this theme will focus primarily on the balance between a safe productive learning environment and the pressures experienced by working families.

<b>Theme#4 Sustaining the Health of Our Staff</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Enhance staff information and knowledge for health	Provide physical safety in a family friendly workplace	Identification of gaps in Occupational Health and Safety measures contained in the Canada Labour Code, Part II, by June 30, 2001
		Establishment of a Policy Health and Safety Committee as required by Canada Labour Code, Part II, by April 30, 2001
		Revision to the <u>Personal Security and Service to the Public</u> pamphlets by April 30, 2001

<b>Theme#4 Sustaining the Health of Our Staff</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
		Development of an information sheet regarding infectious disease protection for District Office staff who visit clients in their homes by April 2001
		Introduction of the wearing of identification badges for employees by July 2001
		Implementation of Consolidated Access Control System by December 2001
		Establishment of a program to monitor compliance with changes set out in Canada Labour Code, Part II, by March 2002
		Completion of a Health and Safety Program audit by March 2003
Foster the development of supportive networks	Facilitate Early Conflict Resolution	Development of an action plan in response to the VA Follow-Up Survey on Harassment and Discrimination and initiate implementation no later than April 1, 2001
		Collaboration of Human Resources Division with the Office of Early Conflict Resolution to develop a learning program on conflict management in the workplace by December 2001
Enhance leadership capacity to support workplace wellness	Improve management awareness of best human resources practices	Establishment of a middle management leadership learning program by December 2001
	Encourage and support performance feedback discussions with staff	Institution of a performance feedback monitoring system by September 2001
Develop a workplace where diversity is valued and supported	Improve recruitment, retention and promotion of employment equity groups in the VA workforce	Development of a new two year departmental Employment Equity Plan by April 2001

<b>Theme#4 Sustaining the Health of Our Staff</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
		Identification of possible barriers to the recruitment/selection of employment equity representatives through a review of employment systems, policies and practices by March 31, 2002
		Review progress towards achievement of established employment equity benchmarks during in-depth review of the VAC 5-Year Strategic Plan and companion VA Strategic Human Resources Strategy in September 2003
	Executive and Management cadres that are reflective of the Canadian population	Establishment of an Employment Equity Development Program by June 2001
		Evaluation of the effectiveness of VA's pilot Employment Equity Mentoring Program by January 2002
		Appointment of an aboriginal participant to the Career Assignment Program (CAP) by September 2001
Enable staff through business process improvements	Decrease workload and/or ease work burden for staff	Re-launch Process Improvement Project (Business Process Re-engineering component) in April 2001
		Commencement of a comprehensive review of the VA pension process, including an examination of process flow/improvement issues, by December 2001
		Completion of implementation of management responses to VA Workload Response Team recommendations by April 2002
Enhance staff career opportunities/fulfilment	Encourage continuous learning among staff	Production of a "Framework for Learning" by December 2001

Theme#4 Sustaining the Health of Our Staff		
Objective	Target	Milestone
		Encouragement of the development of individual learning plans by VA staff, with target of 50% participation by staff by April 1, 2003

## Appendix A: Communications Plan

### Purpose

To set out a communications strategy targeted at employees, Veterans Affairs' clients and the general public in support of Veterans Affairs' sustainable development initiative. The goal of this plan is to ensure that employees, clients and the Canadian public will pass on the legacy of sustainability.

### Public Environment

The federal government announced its Green Plan initiative in 1990, and in 1995 named a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development with authority for federal activities in these areas. The initiative requires all federal agencies and departments to table their Strategy on Sustainable Development every three years. VA tabled its first strategy on December 15, 1997. The second three-year strategy is scheduled to be tabled early in 2001.

A Portfolio policy and strategic plan have been developed to ensure the integration of sustainable development concepts within the Portfolio, and an Environmental Stewardship Committee, with representation from across the Portfolio, has been formed. In addition, an Environmental Management System will be developed and implemented to meet the requirements of the overall federal government objectives.

The Environmental Stewardship Committee is planning and organizing activities to create awareness of environmental issues and concerns throughout the Portfolio.

Opportunities to promote sustainable development through partnerships with other federal departments, provincial and municipal governments and the private sector will also be explored to identify areas of common concern and develop strategies for implementing sustainable development concepts. Although Veterans Affairs is committed to sustainable development concepts as a social policy Portfolio, there is less scope to develop projects like those found in the economic and natural resource sector departments.

**Target Audiences**

- < Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development
- < Parliamentarians
- < All Portfolio employees
- < All levels of government
- < Veterans/Clients
- < General public



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## Communications Objectives

- < to communicate and explain the integration of sustainable development concepts, principles and objectives into the Portfolio's policies, programs, operations and decision-making;
- < to create an awareness of sustainable development among senior managers and employees and encourage their support in adopting the concepts;
- < to raise internal awareness of the need to think in a sustainable manner;
- < to educate managers and employees as to what an EMS and SDS are, what the benefits are and how it applies to them;
- < to share success stories, best practices and lessons learned; and
- < to gain support for the EMS and SDS initiatives from all levels of the Portfolio.

## Messages

- < VA has developed strategies to create an awareness of sustainable development within the organization and to integrate sustainable development into its business practices.
- < Government must provide leadership in this area, so departmental strategies are critical to the advancement of federal sustainable development.
- < Veterans Affairs' SD focus is changing the emphasis from environmental concerns to the areas of commemoration and health promotion.
- < Senior management have embraced the principles of the SDS and environmental stewardship and will continue to work towards fully integrating these practices into our decision-making process.

## Strategic Considerations

The principle audience for this strategy is the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. The report will be produced to the specifications outlined in *A Guide to Green Government*, and will be tabled in the House of Commons.

The strategy will be supported through the development of the EMS and the work of the Portfolio's Environmental Stewardship Committee, which was mentioned earlier. Therefore, the components of this communications plan will focus more on providing employees with a well-rounded perspective on sustainable development, including the social and economic components. Since they are complex issues, the action items will focus on demonstrating sustainable development rather than explaining it. VA will continue to build on initiatives that were successful as a result of VA's first Sustainable Development Strategy in 1997.

### Communications Activities and Vehicles

Action Item	Objective	Responsibility	Time frame
Publish the Veterans Affairs Strategy for Sustainable Development	To meet the requirements of the Auditor General of Canada	Corporate Planning	mid-February 2001
Prepare a briefing note for the Minister	To answer any questions that may arise when the strategy is tabled	Corporate Planning & Communications	December 15, 2000
Prepare questions & answers on Veterans Affairs strategy	To be prepared to respond to any enquiries	Corporate Planning & Communications	December 15, 2000
Put the strategy and Q&As on the VA Internet site	To share information with employees and the general public	Corporate Planning & Communications	mid-February 2001
Publish health promotion material for inclusion in VA's Health Care web site	To help maintain the quality of life of our veteran clients in an environmentally sustainable way	Health Promotion Directorate	ongoing
Publish Portfolio sustainable development information electronically	To promote all aspects of sustainable development in Veterans Affairs	ESC, Corporate Planning & Communications	March 2001
Continue commemorative /remembrance activities on the VA web site	To commemorate the sacrifices and achievements of Canada's military in an environmentally sustainable way	Commemoration & Communications	ongoing
Participate in Portfolio Environment Week activities	To promote all aspects of sustainable development	Management Support Services (MSS) & Corporate Planning & Communications	annually in April & June

## Appendix B: Assessment of the 1997 Sustainable Development Strategy

### Corporate Planning Division

#### Issue

In December 1999, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development released his annual report to Parliament entitled *Moving Up the Learning Curve - The Second Generation of Sustainable Development Strategies* in which he outlined his expectations of departments as they prepare their next three year Sustainable Development Strategies. In response to the Commissioner's recommendations and because it makes good business sense, Corporate Planning Division in association with Management Support Services Division has undertaken an assessment of our Portfolio's December 1997 Sustainable Development Strategy. This assessment will

facilitate the writing of our second strategy by providing an understanding of the successes, accomplishments and shortcomings of our first one.

## **Background**

As early as 1989, there was growing sentiment for the federal government to strengthen its performance on environmental and sustainable development issues and to be held accountable for that performance. It was no longer acceptable for governments just to talk about improving their performance. It had become necessary for them to assume a leadership role in stewardship of the environment and sustainable development. The underlying goal of the federal government was to meet the needs of the present while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Specifically, the government was intent on achieving continued economic and social development without detriment to the environment and natural resources.

To address this need, the federal government tabled Bill C-83, which launched the Greening of Government Initiative and legislated the requirement that each federal department table a Sustainable Development Strategy before December 15, 1997, and that the strategy be updated every three years. Each department's SDS was to outline concrete goals and action plans for integrating sustainable development into the department's policies, programs and operations.

The SDS that Veterans Affairs tabled in December 1997 contained the following key assumptions:

- < External consultations with clients and suppliers were not practical.
- < Internal consultations would consist of a service delivery staff Focus Group session, discussions with the VA Environmental Stewardship Committee; feedback from selected managers on social and economic aspects of the initiative, and general approval by Departmental Executive Board (DEB).
- < As a social affairs department, much of what VA already did addressed socio-economic aspects of sustainable development.
- < VA was responsible for the environmental impacts of operational expenditures only, leaving grants and contributions as the responsibility of recipients.
- < VA's SDS would lead to the creation of an environmental management framework, inclusive of an accountability framework; a Portfolio Sustainable Development Policy; support, commitment and promotion by management access to appropriate training; and timely evaluation.

The Strategy outlined three goals to be accomplished during its three year life cycle. These goals were:

- < to integrate sustainable development into the decision-making processes and the organizational culture of the Veterans Affairs Portfolio;

- < to sustain and improve the health status and resulting quality of life and well being of Portfolio clients and their families; and
- < to improve the delivery of benefits and services using clean products and advanced information technology in an ecologically efficient manner.

Identified within the strategy was a series of activities or expected results which, when completed, would support the achievement of these three goals. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development reviewed all the strategies tabled in the House in December 1997. Veterans Affairs was recognized as one of four departments that established clear targets.

### **Current Status**

Although well advanced in completing our targets, there has not been a thorough evaluation of the value of these targets in promoting sustainable development in VA. As we begin to develop the second generation SDS, we need to identify what has been accomplished as a result of our first strategy and the need for any changes in direction.

### **What we have accomplished**

- < Senior Managers have signed a commitment document on Environmental Stewardship. This document has been posted in every division of VA.
- < The Environmental Stewardship Committee has been established with representatives from across the Portfolio, including significant representation on behalf of the regions and Ste. Anne's Hospital.
- < Recycling activities are now present throughout the Portfolio. Where feasible, water waste and energy usage is monitored. In shared facilities, PWGSC utilizes waste audits to measure consumption.
- < The Environmental Management System Manual is close to completion and will become the sole guide for the Portfolio on environmental issues.
- < Representatives from Management Support Services and Audit & Evaluation are scheduled to receive ISO 14000 training.
- < The Department is adhering to the *Alternate Fuels Act*, *Halocarbon Regulations*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, but control over adherence needs to be improved as part of our EMS.
- < There has been a growth in the use of electronic media for general Portfolio communications and specifically for the promotion of sustainable development.

### **What we have not accomplished**

Veterans Affairs was audited by the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in October 1998 regarding the implementation of our 1997 SDS. The audit noted that VA had implemented numerous programs to meet the goals of Canada's *Guide to Green Government* and that staff were enthusiastic about the programs in place and indicated a desire to improve the systematic process for managing their SD activities.

However, the audit also observed significant weaknesses in our implementation of the SDS. On the subject of training, the audit observed that in order to implement the Environmental and Sustainable Development (E&SD) management system, staff who are responsible for implementation of the management system will require appropriate training. It also noted that all persons whose work may create a significant impact on the environment should receive appropriate training. In neither instance was sufficient training complete.

On the subject of management involvement in the SDS the audit stated that regular management review is critical to efficient and effective implementation. While it acknowledged some instances of management commitment, it found no evidence of management review procedures. In particular, it was noted that management review procedures must go beyond the review of outputs of the management system, such as percentage of paper recycled, and focus in addition on the effectiveness of the entire management system. It further noted that based on interviews with relevant entity staff and a review of the evidence produced relative to the criteria established, the department's management and control processes do not provide a reasonable assurance that the entity has the capacity to systematically and reliably manage implementation of its sustainable development action plan and progress report.

In general, it can be concluded that although there has been considerable effort to mitigate the negative environmental aspects of our operations as seen in the promulgation of a Green Procurement and Fleet Management Policy, the actual environmental impact on our operations has been relatively minor. To achieve a more significant operational impact in the future, VA's efforts to advance the environmental agenda need to be more strategic.

The most fundamental strategic shortcoming of our first SDS was our assumption that as a social affairs department much of what we already did was sustainable development. This led to the establishment of very modest program related targets that were really a restatement of what was already planned. It appears that this tact was taken to assure buy-in, but it also reflected the limited knowledge of sustainable development by management at VA. This was not unique to our Department. In his annual report to Parliament, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development noted " Many (1997 departmental) strategies appear to represent less a commitment to change in order to promote sustainable development than a restatement of the status quo. These strategies tend to focus more on the past accomplishments than on future directions. Less than one half identify specific policy, program, legislative, regulatory or operational changes that would be made to implement the strategy." With candour, VA must include itself among these departments.

The critical deficiency of VA in advancing the sustainable development agenda has been a lack of commitment on the part of management. Although roles and responsibilities were clearly identified, the responsibility to implement our SDS was left in the hands of a few operational staff with limited authority. Participation on committees such as the ESC and Green Teams, although initially supported by management, did not encompass the entire Portfolio. Even today participants are not receiving the support they require to facilitate the work of the committee. There are no representatives from senior management on the committee.

One final shortcoming is noteworthy - The issue of regular internal audits of the SDS that was identified as a key part of the management review and control process for the strategy has been lost to other priorities. There are no plans for any regular internal review by the Audit and Evaluation Division.

## **Conclusion**

Although the SDS received support from senior management when it was tabled in December 1997, the same level of management commitment was not apparent in the follow-through. Insufficient resources were assigned to implement the SDS. Only when it was determined that VA would be facing an external audit was management interest rekindled. Even then, other than continued efforts to develop the EMS, there was little, if any, lasting attention paid to the audit results. In particular, there have been no consistent measurement and follow-up processes to ensure the complete implementation of the SDS.

A frank review of the SDS initiative in VA indicates that our support for and management of sustainable development has not been sufficient to make a significant difference. The first strategy can be construed as a writing exercise necessary to comply with the requirements to have a SDS, but not substantive enough to have significantly advanced the cause.

## **Recommendations**

To re-energize the implementation of our first SDS and to create a more challenging second strategy document due February 2001, it is recommended that:

- < there be a review of current resource levels committed to the sustainable development initiative;
- < divisional roles and responsibilities be clearly delineated and approved by DEB;
- < sustainable development awareness and/or training be provided to all staff with more intensive training approved and provided to those responsible to implementing and managing the initiative; and
- < the completed EMS manual be presented for approval to the Chief Environmental Officer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services (ADM CS).

In addition to these recommendations, DEB should consider placing emphasis in our second strategy on mitigating the negative effects of our policies and operations on the environment. It is proposed that our goal be to achieve a balance between our “greening of operations” and our “greening of policy development”. Our “greening of operations” activities should focus on improving our resource conservation, waste management and pollution control activities, with measurable targets and action plans that clearly demonstrate how improvements will be attained. Achieving a “greening of policy development” may prove to be more challenging.

There is considerable debate regarding what operations or business activities of federal departments support the social and economic aspects of SD. The general theme emanating from departments (particularly those considered social departments) is that all their business activities

and underlying policies support these concepts and therefore should be included in a SDS. This idea has held true in preliminary consultations in VA regarding the issues to be included in the Veterans Affairs Sustainable Development Strategy. The downside to using this approach is that it can result in the development of a SDS that has policy related targets and action plans that are so broad and difficult to measure that the SDS has little value. It is proposed that the next SDS in Veterans Affairs avoid this by including only policy related targets and action plans that can easily be measured and which have a direct link to social and economic aspects of sustainable development.

If DEB accepts this approach, all “greening of operations and policy development” targets and action plans included in the next VA strategy will demonstrate direct support for sustainable development. They will be measurable and go beyond the status quo. We will not simply identify activities that are already planned, but instead challenge the Portfolio to change its thinking and truly advance this important issue.

### **Detailed preview of Veterans Affairs’ 1997-2000 SDS**

Veterans Affairs’ Sustainable Development Strategy was tabled in Parliament in December 1997. The Strategy’s three-year action plan contains many action commitments to further the Department’s three sustainable development goals.

- Goal #1 Integrate sustainable development into decision-making processes and the organizational culture of Veterans Affairs.
- Goal #2 To sustain and improve the health status and resulting quality of life and well-being for Portfolio clients and their families.
- Goal #3 To improve the delivery of benefits and services using clean products and advanced information technology in an ecologically efficient manner.

<b>Goal # 1 Integrate sustainable development into decision-making processes and the organizational culture of Veterans Affairs</b>		
Objective 1.1 Creating the management structures and procedures necessary to identify environmental impacts, assign resources, monitor and report progress		
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Advancing Sustainable Development</b>
1.1.1 Prepare reports on annual basis against SDS targets and recommend revisions as deemed necessary	/	Helps manage and evaluate the SDS targets
1.1.2 Create Green Teams at Head Office (HO) and all regional offices as a means to integrate SD into the VA organizational and management structure	/	Promotes the concept of “Greening of Government” in the office setting
1.1.3 Develop and promulgate a sustainable development policy, which includes an accountability framework for its implementation	/	Policy was developed and accountability framework developed
1.1.4 Develop a Portfolio environmental management system based upon the ISO 14000 model	/	Provides a manual for the Portfolio to use as a guide for the environmental management system
1.1.5 Develop an accountability framework for SD within VA and ensure that SD performance is evaluated as part of the regular human resource management process		Not yet established
1.1.6 Consider SD implications of all policy and program decisions		Not yet established. EMS under development
1.1.7 Establish an SD audit and evaluation program and build internal capacity to ensure proactive management and due diligence		Not yet established. EMS to be reviewed annually after it is fully developed
<b>Goal # 1 Integrate sustainable development into decision-making processes and the organizational culture of Veterans Affairs</b>		
Objective 1.2 Ensure responsible stewardship of the environment in business functions		
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Advancing Sustainable Development</b>
1.2.1 Amend procurement policies and procedures to favour environmentally responsible products and services	/	Provides a procurement policy that identifies green, as well as hazardous products
1.2.2 Undertake a review of standard operating practices for contracted restoration and maintenance operations at cemeteries and memorials to determine environmental impacts and to develop mitigation strategies	/	Achieved, environmental assessments performed on all restoration projects
1.2.3 Include environmental quality assurance specifications in any lease conditions		Not yet completed
1.2.4 Establish a battery drop at major facilities so as to encourage SD packages at home and in the office	/	Encourages recycling



1.2.5 Revise the parking policy at major facilities to favour car pooling and establish a coordination capacity	/	Encourages the use of car pooling in favour of the environment and the decreased use of fossil fuels
1.2.6 Reduce the consumption of resources by recycling where possible	/	Promotes the concept of greening
1.2.7 Undertake an inventory of all administrative and vacated facilities and develop plans to mitigate any negative environmental impacts	/	Completed and environmental impacts noted
<b>Goal # 2 To sustain and improve the health status and resulting quality of life and well-being for Portfolio clients and their families</b>		
Objective 2.1 To sustain the independence and health of clients through active health promotion strategies and research and development programs		
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Advancing Sustainable Development</b>
2.1.1 Establish a systematic research program at departmental, national and international levels to contribute to knowledge about aging. As part of this program, engage in meaningful and relevant research and discussions with colleague agencies, provincial governments, academics and professional groups, to adapt VA policies and programs to meet the evolving needs of clients	/	Gerontology Advisory Council has been created. Its purpose is to provide advice on issues relating to the “aged”
2.1.2 Publish / promote research, advice and information on programs and service models to meet veterans’ specific needs	/	Numerous papers released on issues related to aging
2.1.3 Proactively use the concept of “health promotion” to improve the quality and longevity of veterans by involving clients in healthier lifestyles that foster independence through improved access and distribution of health improvement materials	/	National health promotion strategy has been developed and implemented
2.2.1 Seek to shape social values relating to global conflict towards more sustainable ones	/	Commemorative and education programs have been developed
2.2.2 Seize opportunities to enhance promotion through use of emerging information technologies	/	Sustainable Development icon on the Intranet has been developed
2.2.3 Continue to promote and support established awareness campaigns	/	Veterans Week and support for other awareness campaigns such as Battle of St. Lawrence, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Two Minute Wave of Silence
2.2.4 Maintain cemeteries and memorials to a standard befitting the respect due to Canada’s war dead	/	Cemeteries maintained using environmental friendly products

2.2.5 Continue to sponsor and coordinate Remembrance Day services nationally and internationally	/	VA participates in annual Remembrance Day activities
<b>Goal #3 To improve the delivery of benefits and services using clean products and advanced information technology in an ecologically efficient manner</b>		
Objective 3.1 The Department will adopt modern and clean technologies in providing client services, as a means to eliminate waste, reduce energy consumption and improve service effectiveness and efficiency		
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Advancing Sustainable Development</b>
3.1.4 Development of an Electronic Document Management System under the BRP Initiative		Not yet achieved. Implementation anticipated in 2001
3.1.5 Enhancements to the Corporate Information System to digitize paper documents to reduce storage and handling requirements	/	Completed all statistical and corporate information available on line
3.1.6 Use of appropriate, cleaner technology and improved business processes to reduce “turnaround times” in responding to client correspondence, enquiries and applications	/	Turnaround times for client application reduced by 67% over the past 5 years
3.1.7 Seek to adapt emerging technologies as a means to reduce financial and environmental impacts of the Department	/	Ongoing with implementation of Benefits Redesign Project and other IT initiatives
<b>Goal #3 To improve the delivery of benefits and services using clean products and advanced information technology in an ecologically efficient manner</b>		
Objective 3.2 To provide VA staff sustainable development awareness training and ensure that appropriate staff are trained in the optimal use of technology so that they might develop innovations which will further reduce energy consumption, waste generation, and water usage		
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Advancing Sustainable Development</b>
3.2.2 Undertake a strategic review of Portfolio training programs to ensure that staff are adequately equipped for the shift to sustainable operations, particularly in the areas of facility management, procurement and policy development		Not yet achieved. Staff have been made aware of Green Procurement and Fleet Management policies
3.2.3 Ensure that staff are aware of SD expectations and their responsibilities	/	Staff have knowledge of Green Procurement and Fleet Management policies

As a department with its own uniqueness, VA also has its own priorities and opportunities for moving the SD agenda forward into the new millennium. In preparing the current update of our strategy, we have identified both positive and negative impacts that the Portfolio is having on sustainable development.

### Strengths that were identified

- < Senior managers have signed a commitment document on environmental stewardship. This document has been posted in every division of VA.
- < The Environmental Stewardship Committee has been established with representatives from across the Portfolio, including significant representation on behalf of the regions and Ste. Anne's Hospital.
- < Recycling activities are now present throughout the Portfolio. Where feasible, water, waste and energy usage is monitored. In shared facilities, PWGSC utilizes waste audits to measure consumption.
- < The Environmental Management System has been completed and will become the sole guide for the Portfolio on environmental issues.
- < The Portfolio is adhering to the *Alternate Fuels Act*, Halocarbon Regulations, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, but control over adherence needs to be improved as part of our EMS.
- < There has been a growth in the use of electronic media for general Portfolio communications and specifically for the promotion of sustainable development.

### Gaps or Opportunities for Enhanced Effort

- < there be a review of current resource levels committed to the sustainable development initiative;
- < divisional roles and responsibilities be clearly delineated and approved by DEB;
- < sustainable development awareness and/or training be provided to all staff with more intensive training approved and provided to those responsible to implementing and managing the initiative;
- < the completed EMS manual be presented to DEB by the Chief Environmental Officer (ADM CS);
- < the issue of training and awareness for management and staff alike remains outstanding;
- < scheduling Sustainable Development Strategy for an internal audit;
- < achieving greater horizontality across departmental lines (with Health Canada, National Defence, PWGSC) and also more horizontality within VA, across branch lines and geographically, also with clients;
- < utilizing more Sustainable Development Partnerships in the vein of our work with Health Promotion for Seniors with Health Canada and the Veterans Affairs Canada - Canadian Forces work and Health Care Coordination Initiative and Client Centered Service Approach;
- < providing better ongoing leadership of how VA manages in regard to the implementation of what we develop as our next SDS and how we measure implementation indicators. Health indicators are very challenging.
- < need for a clearly understood overall goal for our SDS, one understood by all also re-emphasize need for EMS that integrates SD into program/policy decision-making; and
- < need for positive or negative incentives inside VA to accelerate progress toward SDS goals in the December 2000 SDS.

### Appendix C: Portfolio Environmental Management System

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A Portfolio Environmental Management Manual has been written and can be found at <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=Department/reports>. This manual will be updated as required.

## **Appendix D: Operating Principles from the Strategic Plan**

**Operating principles** - the fundamental qualities that are to characterize and distinguish how the Department functions in pursuit of its mission.

In its internal planning documents, VA had identified its operating principles and made the following commitments:

- < provide quality client service in an affordable, responsible manner while ensuring that benefits and services are delivered to clients with courtesy, speed, and fairness;
- < show appreciation toward clients and employees, treating them with respect and compassion;
- < promote a team-based culture for employees while ensuring they are empowered, equipped, and trained to provide professional and efficient service to clients in a challenging, equitable and safe work environment;
- < encourage open communication among Portfolio employees and with clients and stakeholders;
- < exploit enabling information technology to provide improved service levels which result in more affordable program delivery; and
- < conduct work in an environmentally responsible manner.

While the above is considered the Department's "official" list of operating principles, they have not been widely shared. However, the Department has embraced a philosophy of caring for clients and adopted a select group of core values that focus on the delivery of quality service, i.e. courtesy, speed and fairness, to serve as operating principles.

## **Appendix E: Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Minister, Veterans Affairs, is responsible for:

- < presenting a Sustainable Development Strategy in the House of Commons; and
- < providing updates to these strategies every three years.

The Departmental Executive Board is responsible for:

- < approving the Sustainable Development Strategy for tabling in the House of Commons;
- < ensuring the Sustainable Development policy is implemented throughout the Portfolio and that resources are assigned to implement this policy;
- < receiving and reviewing reports on the Portfolio's overall environmental performance and providing guidance on required adjustments to the Environmental Management Framework;
- < ensuring adequate and appropriate communications strategies are in place to effectively communicate sustainable development and environmental stewardship initiatives; and
- < ensuring rulings and determinations of the Legal Services Unit are made available to managers and staff as required.

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services is responsible for:

- < assuming the role and associated responsibilities of Chief Environmental Officer for the Portfolio;
- < accounting for overall environmental performance by the Portfolio;
- < reporting environmental performance to the Departmental Executive Board at least once per year; and
- < recommending approval of the Portfolio Sustainable Development Strategy to the Departmental Executive Board.

The Director General, Corporate Planning is responsible for:

- < developing and updating the Sustainable Development Strategy in consultation with managers in the Portfolio;
- < recommending approval of the Sustainable Development Strategy to the Departmental Executive Board; and
- < ensuring that the principles of sustainability and the environmental concerns have been given consideration in all new policies, programs, legislation and in Memoranda to Cabinet.

The Director General, Communications is responsible for:

- < ensuring the development and implementation of an effective communications strategy to promulgate the policy and related responsibilities; and
- < assisting in enhancing the level of awareness of sustainable development and environmental management to Portfolio management and staff.

The Senior Counsel, Legal Services is responsible for:

- < determining the degree of legal liability of the Portfolio in areas of environmental management relevant to departmental facilities and clients under the *Veterans Land Act*;

- < identifying legislative or regulatory changes that impact on environmental management in the Portfolio; and
- < ensuring compliance with all applicable legal requirements and policy.

The Director, Information Access and Support Services is responsible for:

- < developing and maintaining the Portfolio Environmental Management System;
- < providing support and guidance to the Environmental Stewardship Committee;
- < assisting in the preparation of the Portfolio Sustainable Development Strategy;
- < developing and operating a compliance assurance program;
- < ensuring the conduct of environmental audits to verify compliance with environmental laws and regulations and good environmental management practices; and
- < providing a leadership role to ensure the development of an effective Environmental Management System for dealing with the environmental impacts of the Portfolio's physical operations.

Regional Offices and Ste. Anne's Hospital are responsible for:

- < developing a facility-based EMS, which is based on the Portfolio EMS and which addresses specific environmental risks;
- < determining and representing their unit interests in the development of policy and procedure and in the formulation of departmental positions on a wide range of environmental policy issues;
- < maintaining membership on the Veterans Affairs Environmental Stewardship Committee;
- < appointing an environmental coordinator; and
- < providing regular reports on environmental performance to Corporate Services Branch.

Environmental Stewardship Committee is responsible for:

- < providing a forum for departmental representatives to exchange ideas and discuss strategies/approaches for implementing environmental stewardship "best practices" in their respective organizations;
- < contributing to the development of overall departmental goals and objectives for preparation of the Sustainable Development Strategy and Environmental Management System; and
- < coordinating the planning of environmental stewardship events and activities, such as for National Environment Week.

Responsibility Centre Managers are responsible for:

- < implementing environmental policy within their respective units;
- < ensuring that management systems are in place for environmental compliance and reporting systems are established for any instance of non-compliance;

- < maintaining records pertaining to environmental matters and making them available when requested by persons carrying out environmental audits or reporting on environmental stewardship; and
- < providing input to Portfolio stewardship plans.

VA Staff are responsible for integrating sustainable development principles and environmental stewardship best practices into operational, financial, safety, health and other relevant concerns in their job duties and decision-making processes.

### Appendix F: Evaluation Schedule

<b>Evaluation Schedule</b>	
<b>Spring</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Environmental Stewardship Committee Best Practices  Sustainable Development Strategy Activity Report to Environmental Stewardship Committee Annual Meeting	Review of Sustainable Development Strategy Action Plan  Review of Strategic Plan / Sustainable Development Strategy
<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>
Portfolio Performance Report / Sustainable Development Strategy	Report on Plans and Priorities
In 2003, mid year, Audit and Evaluation Division will conduct an internal audit of the SDS on behalf of the Office of the Auditor General.	

## **Appendix G: Consultations**

The Portfolio began to develop its Sustainable Development Strategy by identifying an initial set of sustainable development priorities and issues in late 1998.

This process drew on the awareness of sustainable development issues that existed throughout the Portfolio and on the extensive consultation with internal managers and members of the Environmental Stewardship Committee.

Consultations were conducted beginning as early as February 2000 with senior managers comprising the whole Portfolio. The information gathered during this consultation process was incorporated into the Action Plan.

Attendance at the Leader's Forum in April 2000, broadened the Portfolio's view of the issues that were first and foremost in the minds of Canadians. The themes emanating from the Forum were considered and the appropriate ones with some modifications, have formed the basis of the Strategy.

In September 2000, Veterans Affairs attended and presented at the Sustainable Development and Healthy Canadians Joint Consultation Session, in Ottawa. Feedback was received and incorporated into the strategy.

The Portfolio has been and continues to be an active participant at the Assistant Deputy Minister's Task Force on Sustainable Development Meetings and at the Interdepartmental Network of Sustainable Development Strategies.

Late in 2000, the document was sent out to stakeholders, senior managers, the three Assistant Deputy Ministers, the Associate Deputy Minister, the Deputy Minister, the Minister's Office and Veterans' Organizations.