



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (SDSs)

## Background

In 1995, amendments were made to the *Auditor General Act* to help strengthen the federal government's performance in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development. The amendments required departments to prepare SDSs within two years, to turn the concept of sustainable development into concrete action – in their policies, programs and day-to-day operations, and to update their SDSs at least every three years. By the end of 1997, 28 SDSs were tabled in the House of Commons. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD) was appointed by the Auditor General to help Parliamentarians assess progress made by the government through the SDSs.

## *A Guide to Green Government*

The government issued *A Guide to Green Government* to help departments prepare their SDSs. The *Guide* presented the main elements of a sustainable development strategy:



- Departmental Profile
- Issue Scan
- Consultations
- Goals, Objectives and Targets
- Action Plan
- Measurement, Analysis and Reporting of Performance

## Review of SDSs

In 1998, the CESD's first review of 28 SDSs found that:

- ✓ departments did the majority of things they had been asked to do;
- ✗ departments failed to set clear targets to judge whether the strategy was being successfully implemented; and

- ✗ many strategies restated the status quo rather than making concrete commitments that would better protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

## *Moving up the Learning Curve: The Second Generation of SDSs*

On December 8, 1999, the CESD released a document entitled *Moving up the Learning Curve: The Second Generation of Sustainable Development Strategies* outlining expectations for the second round of SDSs to be prepared by federal departments. The CESD will be looking for departments to:



- assess their first SDSs;
- reinforce the planning of SDSs; and
- accelerate the development of the management systems needed for action.

The CESD is seeking significant improvements in the quality of SDSs. He also expressed a desire to see departments working closely together in areas of shared responsibility, and feels that support and commitment of senior management in the federal government are critical to moving departments up the learning curve.

## Updating SDSs

- Federal departments are currently in the process of updating their 1997 SDSs, to be tabled in Parliament by December 2000.
- As part of this process, departments are seeking input from within and outside of government to help shape renewed SDSs. Consultations will be ongoing throughout year 2000.
- The federal government will also be consulting collectively on a number of cross-cutting sustainable development themes through the Leaders' Forum hosted by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) this Spring.