

## **Backgrounder**

### **Initial Areas for Action towards Environmental Sustainability**

Federal, provincial and territorial environment ministers have identified three initial issues for action under the Commitment Statement on Environmental Sustainability in Canada.

#### **Science Technology and Research**

To align science and the policy development process more closely, jurisdictions will work towards a common set of science objectives. This will involve the establishment of clearly expressed scientific and research priorities of common jurisdictional interest, better collaboration with other science based stakeholder networks and a better alignment of research and technical development with governments' priorities.

Possible outcomes include a coordinated Canada-wide research and information sharing agenda, and better communication and collaboration among scientists, policy makers, stakeholders and the public.

The Forest Research Extension Partnership (FORREX) illustrates the benefits of this kind of collaborative approach, and how people can be empowered to make more informed decisions when knowledge is shared. The non-profit organization was established in 1998 to help people develop science and knowledge-based solutions to complex forest management challenges.

#### **Monitoring, Modelling and Information Management**

Establishing key environmental indicators (benchmarks) and developing appropriate modeling tools to support decision-making is essential to measuring and reporting on the state of the environment. Effective monitoring of environmental parameters is essential to gather the data for measuring progress against these indicators and models. Finally, environmental data gathered should be based on common standards and the information shared for a multitude of potential purposes.

Possible outcomes include the establishment of national environmental quality and sustainability indicators covering biodiversity, air, land and water; predictive and adaptive models to set long-term priorities and support informed decision making; and common sets of standards for environmental data and its management, localized as required. Other possible outcomes include the development of a standardized system of indicators that reflect progress toward environmental sustainability, improved operation of monitoring and information sharing between jurisdictions, and reporting by governments to their publics.

The National Air Pollution Surveillance (NAPS) Network is an example of what can be accomplished when jurisdictions work together. The NAPS Network was established as a joint program of the federal, provincial and territorial governments to monitor and assess the quality of the ambient air in Canadian urban centres. Under NAPS, uniform databases have been created through the deployment of standardized instrumentation and adoption of nationally consistent standards and methodology for instrument operation, calibration materials, station location criteria and quality assurance programs.

### **Streamlined Regulatory Compliance Promotion and Enforcement Regimes**

Today's fast-paced, increasingly complex and competitive world requires a new environmental management approach that reflects the integration of economic, health, and environmental considerations across the public policy spectrum. By working together, governments will be able to develop and implement modernized compliance promotion and regulatory regimes that better reflect the complexity of current business and environmental realities, while continuing to protect the health and well-being of Canadians.

While joint outcomes should be consistent across all governments, roles and responsibilities could be considered on an issue-by-issue, region by region basis, recognizing the need for variability, and taking into consideration the relative capacities and responsibilities of each jurisdiction. A range of mechanisms would be available, with each government making its own decision on how to interact with others to achieve shared outcomes.

Administrative and equivalency agreements to regulate wastewater effluent from the pulp and paper industry illustrate the benefits possible from regulatory streamlining.

Wastewater effluent from the pulp and paper sector is regulated by the federal government and an assortment of provincial acts and regulations. Jurisdictions have worked together to eliminate duplication. For example, Quebec and Saskatchewan have entered into administrative agreements with the federal government on roles and responsibilities for managing regulatory requirements for the industry. Alberta has also struck a similar equivalency agreement with the federal government. The agreement effectively suspends the administration of the identified federal regulations in Alberta, resulting in a true one-window delivery approach.