
BACKGROUND

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Ministry of Health Services

IMPROVING OUTDOOR AND INDOOR AIR POLLUTION IN B.C.

The 2003 provincial health officer's annual report recognizes that British Columbia is already taking positive steps towards improving air quality. The report also recommends continued action by government, individuals and community partners to reduce both short and long-term impacts of indoor and outdoor air pollutants.

Steps taken by the Province to improve air quality have resulted in:

- The lowest smoking rate in the country, with Statistics Canada reporting that only 16.5 per cent of youth ages 15-19 smoke.
- Legal action against tobacco companies to carry some of the economic burden on health.
- A First Nations Tobacco Strategy that promotes the health and wellbeing of aboriginal people including efforts to prevent tobacco misuse.
- A working group of provincial and territorial ministries of environment, health and occupational health that developed Tools for Schools Action Kit, a pilot program for improving indoor air quality for Canadian schools.
- The AirCare Program, the first program of its kind in Canada, requiring testing of light-duty vehicles in the Fraser Valley for exhaust emissions and emission controls.
- The B.C. Action Plan for Clean Air, establishing new provincial policies, regulations, and standards for vehicle emissions and motor fuels.
- The B.C. Go Green Program, focusing on public education to reduce vehicle use and emissions and promote transportation alternatives in the Fraser Valley and other areas.
- Airshed plans in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, Fraser Valley Regional District, Prince George, Quesnel, Bulkley Valley-Lakes District, and Whistler.

Further action that governments can take to improve air quality include:

- Develop a provincial approach to implement the Keeping Clean Areas Clean/Continuous Improvement commitments in the Canada-wide Standards.
- Continue to reduce air pollution from industrial sources, particularly in the Interior where burning practices, pulp mills, beehive burners and other sources affect air quality.
- Support airshed planning across sectors.
- Create national consensus on more stringent vehicle emission standards for Canada.
- Continue to invest in public transportation and introduce strategies to reduce vehicle use.
- Create additional tax incentives to promote efficient energy use in transportation, building, heating and industry.
- Continue to introduce legislative standards to promote clean air, such as smoke-free indoor spaces.
- Support the banning of tobacco advertising.

Actions for Improving Air Quality for Individuals, Communities and Other Partners

Recommended actions for individuals include:

- Stop smoking in indoor and outdoor areas like building entrances.
- Replace non-certified wood-burning stoves and heat sources in the home with clean and energy-efficient sources.
- Choose alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, cycling, car-pools or public transit, especially for short trips.
- Choose a vehicle with fuel efficiency and low levels of tailpipe emissions – see the Green Vehicle Guide at www.epa.gov/autoemissions/index.htm for information on all models.

Recommended actions for communities include:

- Promote a community culture of clean air.
- Support efforts to eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke indoors and outdoors.
- Participate in area planning on public transit, physical activity and resource conservation.

Recommended actions for corporations include:

- Partner with government to improve standards and promote self-regulation.
- Take steps that exemplify corporate responsibility and build consumer trust.
- Invest in new sources of renewable energy.
- Encourage company health programs, such as stop smoking programs.
- Ensure fleet vehicles use technologies that minimize pollution.

Recommended actions for universities and colleges include:

- Engage in research activities to define air pollutants, estimate burden of disease, assess intervention strategies, support innovation in basic sciences, apply studies to industry, and develop alternative sustainable technologies.
- Study vulnerabilities and variations in exposure to air pollution and health effects in B.C.

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