

## **Environment Ministers collaborate on climate change**

**Whitehorse, February 17, 2009** – Federal, provincial and territorial environment Ministers met today in Whitehorse to discuss a range of issues including municipal wastewater effluent, climate change and strategies to reduce packaging and encourage producers to take greater environmental responsibility for the products they manufacture. Canada committed to consult with provinces and territories in a structured framework of discussion in the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 and in future Canada-US discussions on climate change.

“Climate change has had significant impacts on northerners’ way of life,” said CCME president and Yukon Environment Minister Elaine Taylor, who chaired the meeting. “It is opportune to be hosting the CCME meeting in Whitehorse so Ministers can hear firsthand about the impacts of climate change on Canada’s north. Despite the range of different views and approaches that we have on this important issue, we all agree that we must find common areas of interest where we can work together on climate change,” she said.

Ministers recognized the work done to date in developing the Canada-wide strategy for the management of municipal wastewater effluent developed by CCME. A number of jurisdictions have endorsed the Strategy and are ready to begin implementation.

The strategy sets out a harmonized framework to manage discharges from more than 3,500 wastewater facilities in Canada, many of which are currently in need of repair and upgrading. It provides an agreed-upon path forward for achieving regulatory clarity for owners of municipal wastewater facilities. Performance standards will increase protection for human health and the environment on a national basis. Bilateral agreements between the federal government and provinces and territories will ensure one-window regulatory delivery of the strategy.

Officials provided Ministers with an update on the development of a new, comprehensive air management system for Canada that is focused on air quality based on a system of national standards. Ministers recognized the significant contribution that provinces and representatives from major industry sectors and health and environmental non-governmental organizations have made in doing this work. They acknowledged the importance of air quality for Canadians.

Ministers supported further CCME work with stakeholders on policy and implementation issues. They called for an implementation plan and timelines for the proposal to be brought back to CCME for consideration by Ministers at their next meeting.

In addition, Environment Ministers discussed strategies to reduce the millions of tonnes of waste that Canadians send for disposal in landfills and incinerators each year.

Ministers agreed to start national consultations on action plans designed to reduce packaging and other waste, and encourage manufacturers to be responsible for the end-of-life management of the products and packaging they produce. They also agreed on the need for a comprehensive national standard on packaging. Officials were directed to begin work on this as a priority.

Ministers received an update on water-related CCME initiatives, which have been an ongoing focus for the Council. Progress was provided on the Council's water-related priorities, which include water monitoring and climate change, water valuation and groundwater, as well as longstanding activities related to water quality. As a follow-up to the 2008 Council of the Federation meeting, CCME has recently initiated a study on water conservation and scarcity in the context of Canada's changing climate. Ministers agreed to develop a strategic national vision that captures existing water priorities.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Ontario Environment Minister John Gerretsen assumed the presidency of CCME for the coming year. "I am pleased to take on the role of president of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment for 2009," he said. "We face a number of pressing environmental challenges in Canada from climate change to reducing waste and packaging, from preventing pollution to helping clean the air we breathe and ensuring clean water for generations to come."

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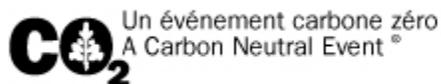
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The following information is also available:

- [Backgrounder on National Strategy for Managing Municipal Wastewater Effluent](#)
- [Backgrounder on Extended Producer Responsibility](#)

CCME is the major intergovernmental forum in Canada for discussion and joint action on environmental issues of national and international concern. Further details are available at [www.ccme.ca](http://www.ccme.ca).



## **Backgrounder: Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent**

Municipal wastewater effluent is one of the largest sources of pollution, by volume, discharged to surface water bodies in Canada. Reducing the discharge of pollution through wastewater effluents requires a number of interventions ranging from source control to end-of-pipe measures. Wastewater effluents are currently managed through a variety of policies, by-laws and legislation at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels. The *Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent* will institute a harmonized approach to managing discharges from more than 3,500 wastewater facilities in Canada, and establish a one-window approach to governance so operators and facility owners deal with a single regulatory agency.

In November 2003, Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) agreed to develop a Canada-wide strategy to manage wastewater effluent. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have worked in partnership and in consultation with stakeholders to ensure that wastewater effluents do not pose unacceptable risks to human health and the environment.

The resulting strategy provides a path to regulatory clarity in managing wastewater effluents under a harmonized regulatory framework. The Strategy focuses on two outcomes:

1. improved human health and environmental protection; and
2. improved clarity on the management and regulation of wastewater effluents.

The Strategy includes minimum national performance standards to be achieved by all facilities and a process to develop and manage site-specific effluent discharge objectives. The minimum standards are equivalent to secondary treatment. The Strategy also outlines risk management activities to reduce the risks associated with combined and sanitary sewer overflows. High-risk facilities must meet national performance standards within 10 years; low risk facilities will have up to 30 years to comply.

It is expected that jurisdictions will incorporate the key elements of the Strategy into their respective regulatory frameworks and create a one-window approach for regulatory clarity. Agreements will be negotiated between the federal government and provincial governments, and between the Government of Canada and the Yukon government. The federal government will also negotiate agreements with the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, taking into account the respective roles of all governments as well as the regulatory bodies.

The cost of implementing the Strategy over 30 years is at least \$10-\$13 billion, including capital and non-capital costs. About half of the costs will be expended

in the first 10 years of implementation, primarily to address high-risk facilities. The initial cost estimates do not include all costs associated with implementing the Strategy, in particular those costs associated with managing combined sewer overflows and meeting site-specific effluent discharge objectives.

The Strategy's economic plan includes a number of funding principles intended to assist jurisdictions improve the way wastewater effluents are managed. It also spells out several funding options, including:

- full cost recovery,
- federal infrastructure funding in partnership with provinces and municipalities
- public private partnerships
- strategic budget allocations
- debt financing

It may be challenging for many small and very small communities to implement the Strategy. Because of their limited fiscal capacity, they may have to look at flexible implementation options.

CCME will regularly assess progress on implementation of the Strategy. A coordinating committee under CCME will monitor implementation with a focus on continuous improvement. Progress towards meeting the requirements of the Strategy will be reported to CCME Ministers and Canadians every five years.

[Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent](#)

## **BACKGROUNDER: EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY**

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is an approach to environmental policy where producers and distributors assume responsibility for managing their product waste, rather than placing the burden on municipalities. The overarching goals of EPR are to minimize environmental impacts, maximize environmental benefits, promote the transfer of end-of-life responsibility for the product and/or material to the producer, and encourage design for environment. EPR is currently used in some Canadian jurisdictions for a few products (e.g., paint or used oil). It is used on a wide scale basis internationally.

The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) is working with stakeholders to expand the use of EPR in a broader and more uniform fashion. A Canada-wide action plan for EPR would provide guidance on the development and implementation of EPR programs.

Products and materials that could be targeted include packaging, printed materials, compact fluorescent lights and other lamps containing mercury, electronics and electrical products, household hazardous wastes and automotive products. Once EPR programs mature, they could be expanded to include construction and demolition materials, furniture, textiles, carpeting and appliances containing ozone-depleting substances.

### **Packaging**

There is interest in reducing packaging waste in Canada and promoting more sustainable packaging choices at all life-cycle stages – from raw material acquisition to disposal, reuse and/or recycling. As part of the EPR initiative, the CCME is exploring the development of a Canada-wide strategy for sustainable packaging. The strategy would aim to encourage more sustainable packaging choices by businesses and consumers and, through EPR, ensure systems are in place to recover packaging materials. The strategy would apply to packaging used by manufacturers and distributors of a wide range of products including food and beverages, and packaging used by retailers, restaurants and the transport industry.

Future work on the EPR strategy could include many components, including:

- requirements for packaging;
- negotiated agreements with specific industry sectors to reduce packaging and improve sustainability;
- consistent guidelines, standards and/or visual identification for packaging that includes recycled content or that is reusable, recyclable and compostable; and
- sustainability criteria for packaging that reflects the entire life cycle.

A focused consultation program, including a face-to-face meeting of invited experts plus a web-based consultation open to the public, will be held in 2009-10.