

Ministers move forward with new approach on air quality

St-John's NL – October 20, 2010 – Federal, provincial and territorial Environment Ministers are moving forward with a new collaborative air management approach to better protect human health and the environment.

“Air pollution has a huge impact on the environment, human health and the economy,” said the Hon. Charlene Johnson, Newfoundland and Labrador’s Minister of Environment and Conservation, and CCME president.

A study released by the Canadian Medical Association in 2008 calculated that the costs of illness caused by air pollution exceeded \$8 billion annually in Canada. Air pollution also has adverse effects on aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, reduces agricultural and forestry production and damages building surfaces.

“This new management approach is comprehensive, and will improve air quality in Canada. This initiative builds upon existing federal, provincial and territorial actions to manage air quality,” said Minister Johnson. “Setting clear standards will ensure closer links between strong economic development and a sustainable, healthy environment.”

The proposed new air quality management system would include more ambitious Canadian air quality standards and consistent industrial emissions standards across the country. The nature of provincial and territorial participation in the system will be subject to individual jurisdictional approval. It would establish regionally coordinated airsheds and air zones within individual provinces and territories. Under the new system, Canadians would have ready access to information about air quality through new public reporting, modeling and monitoring mechanisms. This system would facilitate discussions with the United States on air pollution that crosses the Canada-US border.

Ministers have established milestones for progress and initiated work on the first steps of the new system. They committed to a collaborative process and will continue to engage stakeholders. The Ministers directed officials to develop the major elements of the system in 2011. Implementation will begin in 2013. The system is based on a proposed model developed by a committee of experts from governments, non-government organizations and industry. Ministers acknowledged the excellent work of the multi-stakeholder committee over the last two years and thanked all participants.

Ministers also approved a Water Action Plan that will begin in January 2011. The three-year plan sets deliverables and outcomes under five strategic goals adopted by ministers at their last meeting. These goals will help ensure that Canadians have access to clean, safe and sufficient water to meet their needs in ways that also maintain

the integrity of ecosystems. Initial activities under the Water Action Plan include developing:

- A Canada-wide framework for sustainable management of groundwater;
- Guidance documents on sharing of ground and surface water data, climate change vulnerability assessments for watersheds and assessing water monitoring networks for climate change adaptation; and
- Canada-wide principles for Integrated Water Resource Management and sharing best management practices.

Ministers also announced the completion of a new country-wide standard for compostable products and packaging developed by the Bureau de normalisation du Québec, a standards organization. Under this voluntary program, manufacturers will be able to use a special “Compostable” logo on their products to indicate they can be composted in participating municipal or industrial facilities. The standard sets out criteria that products and packaging must meet to prove that the material is compostable.

CCME is the primary minister-led intergovernmental forum for collective action on environmental issues of national and international concern.

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