



Environment minister's commitment to consider changes to Canada's toxics law is on the right track

Environmental and health groups urge Ottawa to act quickly to modernize the Canadian Environmental Protection Act

Ottawa, Ont. - October 11, 2017 (David Suzuki Foundation) (Investorideas.com Newswire) Environment and health groups agree with the federal environment minister that changes are needed to modernize and improve the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), the federal law for regulating pollution and toxic substances.

In June 2017, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development concluded a 16-month review of CEPA by making 87 recommendations to strengthen the law. Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna responded in a letter to the Committee's chair on Friday, indicating that the government is committed to examine potential amendments to CEPA and improve the implementation of the law.

"This is a good next step towards updating Canada's cornerstone environmental law, so that it's consistent with emerging science and actions taken by other countries," said Muhannad Malas, Toxics Program Manager with Environmental Defence. "But words must turn into action. Any delay in fixing our toxics law will mean more preventable deaths, illnesses, and pollution."

CEPA regulates the release of pollution and the use of toxic chemicals in consumer products -- a main source of Canadians' daily exposure to toxics. Exposures to chemicals such as BPA and flame retardants have been linked to many chronic health conditions including cancer, infertility, and behavioural problems in children. These

effects are estimated to cost the Canadian economy tens of billions of dollars in health care costs every year.

"The world has changed since CEPA was last updated in 1999 and toxic chemicals are more and more prevalent in the products we use every day," said Elaine MacDonald, Director of Healthy Communities with Ecojustice. "People's health is at risk from daily exposure to harmful chemicals like BPA from receipts and parabens from shampoos and cosmetics."

In its current state, the Act is ill-equipped to address the impacts that low doses of toxic chemicals, like endocrine disruptors, have on human health. CEPA also weakly protects vulnerable populations, like babies and pregnant women, who are more susceptible to the harms caused by toxics. While environmental rights are increasingly recognized internationally, no federal law explicitly protects Canadians' right to live in a healthy, non-toxic environment.

"The majority of Canadians believe the nation's toxics laws do not adequately protect them, and over 90 per cent believe that they have the right to a healthy, non-toxic environment," said Peter Wood, National Campaign Manager, Environmental Rights with the David Suzuki Foundation. "Canada must join the nearly 150 countries that recognize in law the right to a healthy environment."

The Standing Committee's recommendations for strengthening CEPA received wide public and stakeholder support, especially in regards to a set of 11 recommendations to improve the regulation of toxic substances.

"Acting on the recommendations made by the Standing Committee would prevent disease and curb environmental pollution," said Kim Perrotta, Executive Director with the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE). "Canada has to reverse the onus of proving safety for substances of greatest concern onto industry, address toxics that can harm health at extremely low doses, and truly protect the most sensitive members of society."

"Reforming CEPA goes hand-in-hand with the federal government's agenda to improve Canada's environmental laws that were gutted in the past few years," said Annie Bérubé, Director of Government Relations with Équiterre. "CEPA is almost two decades old and has largely failed to protect us from the effects of toxics. It would make no sense to let this golden opportunity pass."

The groups urge the government to introduce amendments to strengthen CEPA within the next six months.

This is a joint release from Environmental Defence, Ecojustice, David Suzuki Foundation, Équiterre, and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

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