

EXTRACTIONS



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INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANT REGISTERS PROTOCOL

NGOs are angered by governments chipping away at international pollutant registers protocol.

In March, Michael Stanley-Jones of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition attended the 4th meeting of the UN Working Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers on behalf of the International Campaign for Responsible Technology. "There is a real danger now that the PRTR Protocol will fall well short of the expectations set by ministers and NGOs in Aarhus in 1998," reports Mr. Stanley-Jones. Here are some of the issues still unresolved in the latest draft (October 15, 2002):

- The US has asked for elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from the proposed register because they don't want anything in the protocol that would require any changes in US law
- The European Community (EC) countries are waffling on including major diffuse source emissions (such as agriculture and transport), radioactive substances, noise, and genetically modified organisms
- The Step-by-Step approach to implementation of the Protocol already agreed by the Working Group is also under attack from the US and being interpreted in a severely limited way by EC countries
- Using the precautionary principle to decide which products to report

On a brighter note, two non-European countries — Jamaica and Fiji — have expressed interest in joining the eventual PRTR Protocol. The participation of island nations in the Protocol would greatly bolster the case for including greenhouse gas emissions and help popularize the Protocol among nations of the Global South.

The final meeting of the Working Group is scheduled for the last week of January 2003, in time to adopt and sign the Protocol at the fifth Ministerial "Environment for Europe" Conference in Kiev in May.

[from http://www.svtc.org/resource/news_let/spring2002.htm,
<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.htm>]

OUR CANADIAN APPROACH

The overall approach outlined in the Climate Change Plan for Canada reflects the principles suggested by provincial and territorial governments in their October 28th statement on climate change policy.

For example, the Plan is consistent with principles articulated in that statement such as the sharing of benefits and burdens across the country, the importance of a made-in-Canada approach, the need to continue to pursue recognition for Canada's exports of cleaner energy and the necessity of recognizing early action by industry. Specifically, the Plan recognizes the importance of:

- a made-in-Canada approach based on collaboration, partnerships, and respect for jurisdiction
- no region bearing an unreasonable burden
- taking a step-by-step approach that is transparent and evergreen
- minimizing mitigation costs while maximizing benefits
- promoting innovation
- limiting uncertainties and risks

The Plan sets out a three-step approach for achieving Canada's climate change objective of reducing annual greenhouse gas emissions by 240 megatonnes (MT).

1. There are the investments to date that will address one third of the total reduction (80 MT), including 30 MT of credits for soils and forests.
2. It articulates a strategy for a further 100 MT reduction over the first commitment period (2008-2012).
3. It outlines a number of current and potential actions that should enable Canada to address the remaining 60 MT reduction.

[from http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/plan_for_canada/plan/index.html]

OBSCENELY GREEN

In a letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*, Robert Girvan wrote,

“So, Lorne Rubinstein (Viva Golf Vegas, Nov. 13) likes golfing in the desert around Las Vegas at one of 60 golf courses. It must be awesome to see miles of green grass in a desert. I notice that Mr. Rubinstein didn't once consider that in a world with a finite supply of water and a growing water crisis, 60 golf courses in the desert is more than a little obscene. I wonder where Americans will get their water in the future when they have used up theirs on golf courses?”

Although the number of courses has tripled in the last decade, there is some recognition of the need to conserve. Ordinary tap water, suitable for drinking costs about \$2 per 1,000 gallons, reflecting the costs of filtering it, chlorinating it, and pumping it from Lake Mead, 27 km east. However, it costs 20 to 40 cents per 1,000 gallons, one-fifth or less of the drinking water cost, for wastewater clean enough to use on turf. Several courses are now using this recycled water, which contains nitrogen and phosphorous, both good fertilizers.

[from *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 18, 2002, http://www.npri.org/issues/issues02/i_b101902.htm]

PBDEs IN BREAST MILK

Chemicals used in a range of home products to prevent fires are rising dramatically in breast milk, according to Mebran Alae and Jake Ryan, scientists at Environment Canada. An unpublished study, presented recently at an international dioxin conference in Barcelona, showed that the level of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) increased more than ten-fold in Canadian women from 1982 to 2002.

PBDEs are a class of flame retardants, widely used in electronics, construction materials, furniture, and textiles. The production and use of PBDEs have steadily increased since the 1970s.

PBDEs are persistent in the environment and have a high potential for bioaccumulation. “We're finding it in almost every component of the environment, from air samples in the Arctic all the way up to food chain to human breast milk,” Mr. Alae said.

“At certain levels, there is no evidence that the chemicals pose a risk to human health, and breast milk is still considered the safest thing to feed babies,” said Mark Feeley, a toxicologist with Health Canada. Higher levels of PBDEs can affect brain development and may cause cancer. Health Canada is about to launch a new study to determine if current breast milk levels are toxic.

[from *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 18, 2002, <http://www.nrdc.org/breastmilk/>]

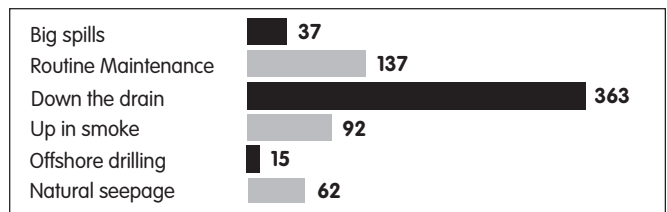
OIL AND WATER

It is not surprising, in a world dependent on tankers delivering oil, that some of those tankers will sink and the results may be dramatic and devastating. When the single-hulled tanker *Prestige*, foundered off the Spanish coast spilling thousands of tonnes of oil, governments were forced to act. On December 3, the European Union released a list of 66 ships banned from its ports, hoping it will prevent future oil spills in EU waters. The EU's Executive Commission also called for the total ban of heavy oil fuel transported by single-hulled vessels.

Since 1996, all new oil tankers built worldwide have had to have double hulls — one inside the other, for greater protection if the outer hull is damaged. But for the thousands of older vessels, the 158-member International Maritime Organization has set a generous deadline: single-hull tankers must be taken out of action by 2015 or until they are 25 years old, whichever comes later. (The *Prestige* was 26, but is said to have received a clean bill of health in its most recent inspection.)

According to statistics from the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation, the number of tanker spills over 700 tonnes has decreased from an average of 24.2 spills per decade in the 1970s to 7.3 in the 1990s. Only 14% of those spills were due to hull failure.

However, the greatest amount of oil-spill pollution is from many more smaller spills. The graph below shows how many millions of gallons of oil each source puts into the oceans worldwide each year (1995 data).



[from *The Globe and Mail*, November 25 and December 3, 2002, <http://www.itopf.com/stats.html>, http://seawifs.gsfc.nasa.gov/OCEAN_PLANET/HTML/peril_oil_pollution.html]

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