

Kyoto: a recipe for moving forward

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Just as Canada received praise when former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced our country would sign the Kyoto Protocol, we once again have the opportunity to play a leadership role in the protection of the planet's air, water and soil.

Kyoto is here to stay, and Canada's federal departments must work together to find common solutions. The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy encourages the Paul Martin government to initiate tax incentives and increase technological investment to once again position Canada as an environmental leader.

Canada owes it to the rest of the world to protect our abundant but threatened natural heritage. We need tax incentives, tough legislation and policies to guide manufacturers, energy users and the general population to make smarter choices that will bring us closer to world standards in emission control by 2012.

If there is to be any voluntary action, it should be by the average person deciding which renewable energy source, or which form of clean transportation, to choose.

Canada needs to demonstrate that our citizens can make smart choices without affecting our economic stability. We must build on existing research in renewable energy. We must advance the technologies of water filtration and purification.

And more must be done to capitalize on the abundance of wind, wave and solar energy generation capacity Canada has within its grasp.

The environmental cry of the '80s "think globally, act locally" still rings true. Greenhouse gas emissions impact the entire planet, but we can only succeed in reducing pollution in our own backyard.

The true cost of climate change and smog alerts is felt locally, in our hospitals, in our nursing homes, in our schools. The federal government must support municipalities in their efforts to improve mass transit, make smarter choices, and lead by example in the purchases of environmentally friendly products and services.

Even something as simple as choosing a fuel-efficient automobile can dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions when multiplied by the millions of Canadians who drive every day.

In short, Canada needs to stop subsidizing the processing of petroleum and instead invest those funds in clean energy technologies.

Reducing our greenhouse gas emissions can support economic development without threatening the status quo. At present, lack of appropriate incentives and investment means Canada cannot capitalize on the growing global appetite for clean technologies.

Token gestures by the federal government and the emphasis on marketing campaigns need to be replaced by incentives for clean technologies to build manufacturing facilities in Canada – creating thousands of domestic jobs.

Our country continues to live in the past by exporting fossil-based resources. At the same time, Canada is forced to import clean technologies to achieve cleaner air and reduced emissions.

However, with proper investment, Canada can transform itself into an environmental leader.

Individual Canadians are taking action on Kyoto through the One Tonne Challenge. Now it's time for the Canadian government to step up to the (Kyoto Protocol) plate. Canadians are waiting. The world is watching.