

The federal government recently announced a new program, Action 21, to help Canadians take action in support of a healthy environment. Action 21 has two components: a community funding program for nongovernment, nonprofit organizations, and a public awareness initiative to encourage Canadians to make choices in favour of the environment in their daily lives.

Many organizations across Canada are promoting environmental citizenship at the community level. One example is the Envirotowns program of the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation.

Training

Occupational training related to environmental issues is growing. The Canadian Labour Congress has produced a program on workers' environmental rights that stresses the creation of joint union-management environment committees for extending the mandate of existing health and safety committees. It also promotes introducing a right to environmental information from employers and a right to refuse to pollute as an extension of the right to refuse unsafe or unhealthy work.

Some corporations have engaged training specialists to empower employees to change their environmental behaviour in the workplace.

Universities are training tomorrow's environmental leaders by offering programs in environmental science, environmental management, and other topics related to sustainable use of resources.

Challenges and Next Steps

In spite of considerable progress, there are obstacles that challenge the promotion of environmental education, public awareness, and training in Canada. The lack of a consistent environmental education strategy is compounded by an absence of formal training available for environmental and sustainability educators.

Environmental education and public awareness programs are affected by the same financial restraints as many other areas. In the private sector, training programs are slow in coming.

It is increasingly important that individuals and organizations work together in partnerships to expand access to and understanding of sustainable development information. It will be essential to reach out to groups that may have been excluded.

As part of the grassroots effort to increase awareness regarding environmental education, the Canadian magazine Green Teacher was started about five years ago. Current readership comprises 8,000 Canadian educators and 3,000 Americans. Articles relate the efforts of environmental educators and development educators side-by-side to help readers readily see the connections between these two themes. Two years ago, an entire issue was dedicated to the concept of sustainability.

The Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environment Industry is an industry-initiated body. Its mission is to ensure an adequate supply of people with the appropriate skills and knowledge to meet the environmental needs of the public and private sectors.