

being identified to measure achievement in the implementation of environmental management systems. As a contribution to this initiative, the Canadian Manufacturers Association is working with eight companies to develop case studies on their efforts to evaluate environmental performance and their use of indicators to do so.

Canada's Contribution to International Indicator Initiatives

Internationally, Canada is participating in the indicator development program of the OECD. Canada leads two OECD technical groups that are working to specify common definitions and measurement techniques for indicators of forestry and of stratospheric ozone depletion. These are part of a core set of indicators identified for use by the OECD for its member country environmental performance reviews.

Under the North American Trilateral Committee on Environmental Information, Canada, the United States, and Mexico have agreed to work on a number of priority areas. One item concerns identifying and developing indicators representative of issues important to all three countries.

The World Tourism Organization adopted a Canadian proposal to develop indicators for sustainable tourism. Canada then led work that identified a series of indicators for this sector and completed a pilot study in January 1994 to test them.

Challenges and Next Steps

One of the challenges facing the development of indicators for sustainability in Canada is to link indicators that track changes in the natural environment to economic and social (including human health) changes, in terms of both causes and effects.

The importance of criteria to guide indicator selection cannot be overstated. There are two overriding considerations: the need for indicators to be scientifically credible and the need for them to be relevant and understandable to non-specialists. Achieving a reasonable balance between these two elements is a challenge.

There is a need for nationally comparable data and harmonized methods of collecting data, monitoring, and reporting on sustainability of ecosystems. Future efforts will focus on the development and selection of indicators that can fit into a hierarchy of national, regional, and ecological frameworks.

Steps such as the ones noted above would address current indicator problems. For example, trend data and measurement techniques are often inadequate, not standardized, and inconsistent. That makes it difficult to compare regions or data from year to year. Current data inventory systems are also inadequate for monitoring and reporting on ecosystem sustainability.