

Water-Pollution Control Directorate

The quality of Canada's waters has, over many years, deteriorated to the point where corrective action is vital. This deterioration is attributable to urban development and industrial growth, which have occurred in relatively confined areas with little or no concern for their effect on the environment.

To combat the decline in water quality, the Water-Pollution Control Directorate administers a national program the object of which is to clean up existing pollution and prevent pollution from new sources in order to maintain a level of water-quality suitable for the protection of fish, for recreational activities and for drinking. Attainment of this object requires the co-operation of the federal and provincial governments, as well as industry.

Legislation in use

The main legislative instrument in the fight against water pollution is the Fisheries Act of Canada, enacted more than 100 years ago, which was designed to protect fish and their use by man. In recent years, this legislation has been found to have limited power to deal with modern pollution.

Revisions of the act passed in 1970 by Parliament have enabled EPS to enforce the clean-up of many of Canada's major sources of industrial pollution. Further provisions enacted in 1977 strengthened the pollution-control aspects of the act.

These amendments allow for broader and more practical control of existing industrial pollution.

Other legislation provides the means for combating certain types of water pollution. For example, the Canada Water Act contains provisions for the control of nutrients, such as phosphates contained in laundry detergents, that stimulate excessive growth of aquatic vegetation. The Canada Shipping Act provides for the control of pollution by ships in Canadian waters. The Environmental Contaminants Act is designed to protect human health and the environment from harmful substances, and the Ocean Dumping Control Act regulates the dumping and disposal of waste and other materials in the ocean.

Strategy

Since the effects of some wastes on the environment are imperfectly understood, the federal policy for their control is to contain pollutants at their source.

Effluent-control requirements, in the form of regulations, guidelines and codes of "good practice" are being developed and implemented under the Fisheries Act on an industry-by-industry basis, with the aim of reducing existing pollution and preventing further degradation of the environment. The requirements, developed in consultation with the provinces and with industry,