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THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA

It has been said facetiously that in Canada the National Research Council does everything in science that no one else wants to do. This is misleading if it is taken to mean that the role of NRC in science is casual or minor. It simply recognizes the fact that a great deal of research is conducted by government departments in such clearly defined areas as agriculture, fisheries, mining and defence. The large remaining areas of science and technology fall within the scope of the National Research Council.

When in 1916, during the First World War, the Government of Canada established the National Research Council, the purpose was clear - to strengthen science as an aid to industrial development. From the beginning the NRC has pursued this objective in two ways: by encouraging and supporting basic science; and, as conditions permitted, by strengthening technology as an aid to secondary industries.

Responsibilities

The duties of the Council are outlined in the Research Council Act. Broadly stated, the Council has charge of "all matters affecting scientific and industrial research in Canada that may be assigned to it by the Privy Council Committee" (to which it reports). The NRC also has the duty of "advising the Government on questions of scientific and technical methods affecting the expansion of Canadian industries or the utilization of the natural resources of Canada".

The Act also designates a number of specific responsibilities: for discovering processes and methods that may promote the expansion of industries or the development of new ones; for maintaining and improving primary standards for Canada and certifying scientific and technical apparatus and instruments used in the government service and in industries; for investigating industrial products or materials at the request of any of the industries of Canada; and for conducting researches on the utilization of industrial wastes.

Organization

The Council itself - the governing body of NRC - is composed of 21 members selected for their scientific attainments, most of whom are scientific administrators in universities, in industry or in government laboratories. Three members are full-time salaried officers of the Council. These are the president and two vice-presidents (one scientific, the other administrative). The rest of the Council undergoes fairly rapid change; two or three members are retired each year and are replaced by new appointees who serve for a term of three years.