

Action 21 provides support to organizations to take action in their communities. It supports projects that have a positive impact on the environment, provide opportunities for Canadians to take action at the local level, encourage more people to practise environmentally responsible behaviours, and address priority environmental issues. In addition, Action 21 is currently sponsoring a project with Health Canada that helps communities link health and environment issues and build their capacity to take action on the issues that they identify as priorities.

Corporate Citizenship

Many businesses have developed policies and practices that support sustainable development. An element of that trend has been corporate involvement in similar efforts at the community level. Some of these are directly related to corporate business priorities. For example, the Consumers Gas Company, together with a number of other companies, is involved in the Ottawa-Carleton Green Communities Initiative in Ontario. This is an energy and conservation project that has benefited users and the company itself.

Corporate support for community sustainable development activities is a relatively new phenomenon. It builds on the long tradition of business support for charitable work, health, culture, and sport. Corporate citizenship takes many forms, such as the contribution of goods and services, the sharing of skills and expertise, and financial support.

Engendering Public Awareness

Corporations are bringing environmental issues to the attention of the public, and the response is influencing public policy. For example, in October 1994, The Body Shop, a skin care and cosmetics company, launched a campaign on the need for endangered species legislation in Canada. It included the distribution of information through its retail outlets across the country, a petition drive, and a letter-writing campaign to the federal Minister of the Environment. Young children, pretending that they were endangered species, sent some 5000 letters and drawings on behalf of the animals. The campaign culminated in the presentation of a 75,000-signature petition to the minister on 17 November 1994, which reinforced the minister's intention to introduce endangered species legislation, an instrument for which various nongovernmental groups and concerned citizens had pressured. On that same day, the minister released a document entitled "Endangered Species Legislation in Canada: A Discussion Paper", which invited public comment, and promised to table endangered species legislation. On 17 August 1995, the Minister released a "plain language" version of the Canadian Endangered Species Protection Act, a legislative proposal, for further public comments.

Because of shared jurisdiction on this issue, the federal government has led the development of a national approach that will provide for the protection and recovery of endangered species across Canada.

In 1992, Shell Canada Chemical Company established an external Product Line Sustainability Advisory Panel to help it understand the sustainability of its business units and products. The eleven panel members, who have expertise in a range of disciplines, have since developed sustainability criteria related to life cycle potential impact and risks and incorporated them in an evaluation tool for product lines and capital investments.

The Conference Board of Canada established the Canadian Centre for Business in the Community in 1995. It reflects the increasingly multidimensional corporate citizenship issues facing business. The centre is dedicated to helping business organizations assume a more effective role in developing and enhancing the communities in which they operate.