

For the first time in history, mankind is capable of altering the global environment, for the worse, permanently. And nowhere is the pressure greater than on the atmosphere, the common heritage of us all. The consequences are serious.

This audience will know that a one per cent depletion of stratospheric ozone is estimated to increase the incidence of skin cancer in some people by as much as four per cent. In this general latitude, ozone is thought to have been depleted approximately by four per cent.

You have had a thorough discussion today on global climate change -- the scorching phenomenon that we got an unpleasant taste of last summer. I won't address myself to the science of this "greenhouse" effect; you have covered that already. Let me just say that if the requisite remedial steps are not taken, Canadian scientists expect to see within fifty years an increase in the earth's average surface temperature of between 1.5 degrees celsius and 4.5 degrees celsius. Temperatures could rise as much as 15 degrees celsius in the polar regions.

However devoutly a Canadian winter can make us wish for that outcome, we will not like many of the negative consequences; for example: increased frequency and severity of drought; a lowering of the Great Lakes; a global sea-level rise of potentially very significant dimensions; increased forest disease and forest fires. Climate change is an extraordinarily complex problem.

It is always difficult to make decisions with major consequences in the face of uncertainty. But it will help us in our resolve to act if we all bear in mind that, because of the greenhouse gases now in the atmosphere, the earth is already committed to some climate changes. The sun's rays are going to get stronger and the earth is going to get warmer no matter what we do. That makes what the IEB is trying to accomplish today all the more timely and the results all the more critical.

Nor is the emphasis we put on the environment confined to the atmosphere. You will be aware of the recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study that shows that in the United States alone over 11 million tons of hazardous substances were disposed of or released into the environment in one year. And we have a special, gathering ecological tragedy made right here in North America.