

PROTECTING THE ARCTIC

Canada's northland comprises 40 per cent of our total land mass, almost 70 per cent of our marine coastline and more than 30 per cent of our freshwater resources. While physically far removed from industrial pollution, the circumpolar regions are at the mercy of the more densely populated parts of the earth. Air and ocean currents carry pollutants such as PCBs, dioxins and pesticide residues to the north, where they accumulate in the food chain. This poses a serious threat to the traditional economies of people living in the north, as well as to Arctic ecosystems.

The Canadian Arctic is part of the larger circumpolar region, where we are neighbours with the U.S., the U.S.S.R., Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. In order to secure a safe future for the Arctic, Canada is building partnerships with its northern neighbours.

- Over the past two years, Canada and the other circumpolar countries have worked toward an international Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. At a meeting held in Finland in the summer of 1991, the Strategy was signed by cabinet ministers representing the eight circumpolar countries. In a joint declaration, the ministers committed to an action plan on pollution in the Arctic. Canada has proposed an Arctic Council to co-ordinate action among the eight circumpolar countries and has offered to establish the secretariat for this council in Canada.
- In order to protect the Canadian Arctic effectively, the federal government has brought forward a national Arctic Environmental Strategy as part of the Green Plan. The five-year Strategy is founded on long-term partnerships with northern governments, non-governmental organizations, native people and the public. Its major elements include cleaning up contaminants in the north, managing waste, improving water quality and protecting Arctic ecosystems. In addition, an Arctic Marine Conservation Strategy has been developed by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans to protect the Arctic marine environment.