

Effective Waste Management and Disposal

Waste left behind by the Cold War, notably nuclear materials related to Russia's Northern Fleet, poses one of the most critical threats to the Arctic environment. The key challenge stems from the fact that the elements of the problem posing the greatest threat and holding the highest priority are those with the highest price tag for remediation. Canada has assisted Russia through initiatives under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), AMAP and NATO. On another level, while the waste management problems created by Cold War activities pose enormous challenges for Arctic governments, every day communities across the Arctic confront the problem of managing local waste, created by the technical and economic difficulties of waste disposal in a cold climate. Dealing with both of these waste problems offers opportunities for circumpolar co-operation.

Environmental Emergency Preparedness

The growth of developmental activities and shipping across the Arctic has raised concerns about the potential for environmental accidents, including spills of harmful substances. These concerns have led Canada and its Arctic neighbours to conclude a variety of bilateral and multilateral arrangements to deal with environmental emergencies. In 1991 they agreed to strengthen the region's emergency preparedness by establishing the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Program, now included under the Arctic Council. Environmental emergency preparedness will continue to be an important element of Canada's northern foreign policy.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RENEWAL

Improving northern Canadians' quality of life goes hand in hand with sustainable development and environmental protection as elements of Canada's new northern foreign policy. Unacceptable numbers of people in Canada's north (mainly Aboriginal peoples) live in terrible conditions, and demographic realities are rapidly intensifying pressures on local and regional governments to deliver infrastructure and services. Responsibility for tackling northern social challenges has been progressively assumed by the territorial governments. However, the alarming social conditions facing so many northern Canadians are also experienced by virtually every Arctic country. For this reason, improving the living conditions of northerners has become a priority for circumpolar co-operation. In pursuing social and cultural renewal for northern Canadians through its foreign policy, Canada will focus on a number of core national objectives.

Provision of Quality Health Care for Northerners

It is unacceptable that in Canada the life expectancy of northerners, notably Aboriginal peoples, is some 20 years less than that of southerners, that infant mortality is twice the national average, and that tuberculosis, hepatitis A and diabetes are all many times as common among Aboriginal peoples as among other Canadians. The health of northerners remains a major concern and a priority for action by the Government. A key dimension of the health issue in Canada's north, however, is international. Again, many of the contaminants found in the Arctic food chain, including in the country foods eaten by northerners, originate in other parts of the globe. For this reason, circumpolar co-operation on health issues, and global efforts to tackle environmental