ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: ACID RAIN

Acid rain continues to be the pre-eminent issue outstanding between Canada and the United States and is a matter of the highest priority for the Canadian government.

Acid rain is endangering the natural resource base in more than 1 million square miles of eastern Canada. This resource base directly sustains about 8 per cent of Canada's gross national product and more than 250,000 jobs. The damage caused by acid rain is estimated at about $1 billion per year.

The effects of acid rain are major, cumulative, and multiple. The facts speak for themselves.

Lakes and Rivers - more than 700,000 lakes receive high levels of acid fallout; approximately 150,000 are being damaged; 14,000 are acidified; 19 salmon rivers no longer support the species.

Forest - more than 50 per cent of eastern Canada's forests, which produce $14 billion worth of products, grow in areas where rainfall is too acidic; acid rain is suspected as an important contributing factor in forest decline being experienced in eastern North America and Europe.

Materials, Buildings and Monuments - extensive damage attributable to acid rain has been widely documented throughout eastern Canada for materials, historic buildings and monuments.

Human Health - more than 80 per cent of all Canadians live in areas with high acid rain-related pollution levels; Canadian and US studies indicate an association between this pollution and respiratory problems in sensitive populations such as children and asthmatics; acid deposition can also mobilize toxic metals such as aluminum, lead and mercury in untreated drinking water supplies.

Canada cannot solve the problem on its own. More than a half of the acid rain falling in eastern Canada comes from the United States. In some areas of particular concern, USA emissions are responsible for 70 per cent of the acid fallout. In 1980, the United States exported about 4 million tonnes of sulphur dioxide to eastern Canada; this almost equalled eastern Canada's total allowable emissions in that year. Only half the problem, therefore, is amenable to a Canadian solution.