



Statements and Speeches

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THE URGENCY OF CONTROLLING ACID RAIN

A Speech by the Honourable John Roberts, Minister of Environment Canada, to the Air Pollution Control Association, Montreal, June 23, 1980

...I am pleased to address an audience where I do not have to dwell at great length on the fact that the issue of air pollution and air quality has changed very significantly over the past 15 years. We, and I mean both Canada and the United States, have tackled — and with measurable success, the most obvious forms of atmospheric pollution.

Back in the Sixties and Seventies, we rode out on our white charger like St. George and we slew the dragons. Today, many of us feel more like Don Quixote than St. George. We know that we are dealing with a far more subtle and insidious foe than we thought possible not too long ago.

In meeting the challenges of the Sixties and Seventies, it became apparent that as we solved the cases of gross, localized pollution, we had to address increasingly the underlying problem of resource use and management, of which pollution is often a symptom. We became aware of the persistent nature of certain chemical substances and their effect on health even at low levels of exposure — effects that are not immediately apparent.

My belief is that the Eighties — this decade — will be the time when we decide, as individuals and as nations, that it will be people and the environment and not people *versus* the environment in the future.

We can have both a healthy environment and a healthy economy. There is pessimism in some quarters, I know: people who suggest that industry doesn't care, science can't find the answers and, governments do not have the will to control air pollution when it means regulations that cut into the profitability of business. I don't believe that and neither do you, or you would not bother taking part in this important conference on the Air Pollution Control Association.

This is not to minimize the problems which lie before us. We have extremely serious problems to deal with — problems which will demand every ounce of our resolve and our intelligence.

Those problems are well known in this gathering but I am going to concentrate on the one which concerns me most deeply.

I am talking about the urgent need to control acid rain emissions from Canadian and American sources. Acidic precipitation is one of the most serious environmental issues facing our two nations today and on this issue I am going to take off the gloves and say some very blunt things, particularly since my audience is predominantly American.
