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MARCH 9, 1987

The Arctic is not escaping ravages of air pollution

by Pippa B. Wysong
reprinted from Canadian Science News

A research laboratory for the continuous monitoring of air pollution in the high Arctic has recently been opened by Environment Canada. The station, located at Alert in the Northwest Territories, will be used to study levels of air pollution, changes in the ozone layer, weather trends, acid snow and a 'cloud' of pollution known as Arctic Haze.

The Alert laboratory is part of an international network of stations set up by the World Meteorologist Organization (WMO) under their Background Air Pollution Monitoring (BAPMON) Program. The aim of BAPMON is to study the long-term effects of pollution on the atmosphere.

Dr. Neil Trivett, Coordinator of BAPMON at Environment Canada, says an advantage of the station at Alert (near the northeast tip of Ellesmere Island) is that it is isolated and very far away from pollution sources. It gives researchers a better idea of how far pollutants travel and how they affect distant regions,

he says.

Traditionally, the Arctic has been famed for its clear air and high visibility — on a good day, people can see as far as 200 kilometres. However, towards the end of World War II, pilots flying over the Arctic noticed the occasional appearance of a haze that reduced visibility.

Tests done in the late 1950's verified that the haze contained man-made pollutants such as sulfates and metals. It also reflected worldwide increased carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels, Dr. Trivett says. Sulfates mix with moisture in the air to produce acid rain or, in the case of the Arctic, acid snow. Most of the Arctic pollutants are believed to come from Europe and the USSR, Dr. Trivett says.

Due to wind and weather patterns, the haze generally appears in the spring. It reduced visibility to 30 kilometres or less, but the reduction is not caused by pollutants alone.

"We think the major cause of reduction of visibility is not because there are so many particles there, but because they're causing ice crystals to form on them," Dr. Tri-

vett explains.

Pollutants are carried from Europe in air currents. During the Arctic spring, the particles attract moisture or water molecules and grow in size. These larger particles block light, and cause a haze. Eventually, the particles become so heavy they fall to the ground, where they remain in the ice and snow.

Compared to big cities or industrial centres, the pollution levels in the Arctic are low. For example, acid levels are five or 10 times lower than those in eastern Canada. But, according to a statement by Environment Minister Tom McMillan, experts fear that even these low levels could have a serious impact on the delicate Arctic environment.

Pollution levels in the Arctic, primarily those of sulfates, have increased 75 per cent since 1959 — a figure that parallels increased emissions from Europe and the Soviet Union, Dr. Trivett says.

Two more monitoring stations, also under the BAPMON program, may be built in Canada in the future — one on Sable Island and one at Cape St. James.



These muskox are part of a very fragile Arctic ecosystem

photo courtesy Boreal Institute for Northern Studies

International students still getting shafted on U tuition fees

OTTAWA (CUP) — Canada's governments are finally realizing the worth of international students, claims the Canadian Bureau for International Education.

Policy director Jim Fox says recent statements by External Affairs Minister Joe Clark show "steps seem to have been made in a rather positive direction."

Responding to the report of a Parliamentary committee on Canada's international relations, Clark told the Commons Dec. 4 that "the Government shares the committee's belief that foreign students constitute an important asset for Canada as well as for developing countries."

Fox said the CBIE, which has long campaigned for the elimination of differential fees and institution of greater financial aid for students from poorer countries, is heartened by Clark's move.

"The fruits that this direction will bear are still nebulous, (but) clearly the principles are quite appropriate," Fox said.

Differential fees are stiff surtaxes charged to international students. CBIE research shows that international student enrollment has dropped from 37,000 in 1982, when many governments introduced steep increases to differential fees, to about 27,000 this academic year.

All provinces but Manitoba and Newfoundland charge differential fees, though Fox said recent statements from the Council of Ministers of Education indicate the tides of opinion are changing.

"The thinking in the country, finally, seems to have changed," said Fox. "In the late 1960's, international students were considered to be a drain on taxpayers."

"Now the Council of Ministers of Education views international students as an asset, and not a liability," Fox said.

In Ontario, a new report by the Ontario Federation of Students calls on the Peterson administration to abolish differential fees by 1992.

"Differential fees are an international embarrassment. It has gotten completely out of hand," said OFS researcher Ken Alexander. "Canada is no longer an attractive place to study."

The report notes other countries that attract international students, including West Germany, France, the U.S., and Great Britain, are stepping up recruitment efforts, while Canada's high differential fees deter potential visa students.

OFS recommends that differential fees for graduate students be cut immediately, while undergraduate fees be phased out over the next three to five years.

Bob Richardson, assistant to Ontario Colleges and Universities Minister Greg Sorbara, said OFS's recommendations "merit consideration by the minister. We were particularly impressed by their grad student argument."

The OFS report also calls on Ottawa to set a national policy on international students.

"Visa students should be a foreign aid issue, not only an education issue," said Alexander, noting many international students promote Canada when they return home after study.

"We also need to take some responsibility for helping developing underdeveloped countries set up their own education infrastructures," he said.

Clark pledged in Parliament to increase the number of scholarships arranged through the Canadian International Development Agency, but has not yet announced how much money will be provided, or where it will be allocated.

Fox said the CBIE has offered its services in establishing a national policy with the federal government. He said a "host of inconveniences" facing many international students must be cleared, including bureaucratic delays in processing application and restrictions on employment for many visa students.