The National Research Council – what it is and what it does

The National Research Council (NRC) is Canada's largest and most diversified research and development organisation. It carries out a wide range of both basic and applied research, undertakes studies on topics of national concern, and provides laboratory support in areas of technology important to Canadian industry. It manages several industrial development programmes, runs major national facilities for the Canadian scientific community and is responsible for making scientific and technical information accessible to Canadians.

The NRC operates 16 research divisions, named to reflect the areas in which they specialize. The laboratories span Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The Council operates the Institute of Marine Dynamics in St John's, Newfoundland, the Atlantic Regional Laboratory in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Industrial Materials Research Institute in Boucherville, Quebec, and the Biotechnology Research Institute in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; the Tri-University Meson Facility in Vancouver, British Columbia, is run on behalf of NRC by the Universities of British Columbia, Victoria and Alberta, and by Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia.

Several other divisions of NRC are located in Ottawa. They include: Chemistry; Physics; Biological Sciences; Mechanical Engineering; Building Research; Electrical Engineering; the National Aeronautical Establishment; the headquarters of the Herzberg Astrophysical Institute; and the Canada Centre for Space Science.

NRC eases the transfer of technology

Both short-term and long-term projects are conducted in NRC laboratories. Short-term research aims at immediate applications and focuses on clearly delineated problems in selected areas. The aim of NRC's long-term research is to extend the frontiers of knowledge and to expand the technological base of Canadian industry.

When projects are ready to be exploited by industry, NRC eases the transfer by providing funding, staff expertise and special facilities.

A company needing funds to exploit a good research idea can get help from NRC. Canadian companies can also use the services of NRC field offices from coast to coast. They provide companies with the latest technology to help solve their industrial problems.

The NRC's industrial support programmes have made a substantial contribution to the economic and social development of Canada by increasing sales and reducing costs for industry.

When it was formed in 1916, the NRC was a council of 11 advisers which, several years later, acquired scientists, laboratories and research projects. Today, it is a federal agency governed by a council comprising a president and 21 members appointed by the federal Cabinet.

Members of the current council, who represent all regions of Canada, have a three-year mandate to provide over-all guidance and direction to the policies and research programmes of NRC. They come from industry, university and governments, and constitute an impartial group of scientific and management experts.

Members of council also serve on NRC's Associate Committees – another of the wide variety of mechanisms that NRC has traditionally used to make external advice available in selected areas of science.

The NRC Associate Committees provide an effective means of co-ordinating scientific activities across the country and contributing to the exchange and dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Recently, two new committees were created. An Associate Committee on Biotechnology which advises NRC in its efforts to define its policies in that field. And an Associate Committee on the Occupational Applications of Ergonomics Research which will promote the knowledge and application of ergonomics – an emerging discipline aimed at maximizing human well-being and performance in various settings, particularly the work environment.

The NRC currently has 25 Associate Committees with over 50 attendant sub-committees, task forces and standing committees, involving over 1000 scientists and engineers from across Canada.

NRC and its links with Canadian industry

Industrial research is the backbone of economic growth. NRC has long been a close partner with Canadian industry, operating programs aimed at the diffusion of technology so that firms can take advantage of innovations through improving their own research and development (R&D) capability and through the transfer of technology from Canada and foreign sources. NRC's Industrial Development Office has as its goal the provision of formal programs and channels for interaction between NRC and industrial firms and, in particular, to generate and apply technical know-how and information in Canadian industry. Among the major elements of the Industrial Development Office are the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP) and the Program for Industry/Laboratory Projects (PILP).

Technology Transfer Programme offers opportunities for UK firms

Research and development are fundamental to economic growth. Because of this importance, the National Research Council of Canada is committed to working with industries in Canada and around the world to make sure that new technology is diffused effectively, and that Canadian firms take full advantage of major innovations.

It is the NRC's Industry Development Office (IDO) that provides formal programmes and channels for interaction between the Council and industrial companies.

In implementing its Technology Transfer Programme, the IDO employs 150 Industrial Technology Advisors (ITAs), who are located across Canada. The ITAs work not only in the NRC's own