

Putting out the Fire



It was expected to take years, but the oilfield inferno, ignited by Saddam Hussein's withdrawing troops, has been extinguished after 200 gruelling days.

In October, Canadian firefighters capped the final well, while Kuwait's Sheik Jaber Ahmed Sabah ceremonially pushed a lever to stop the flow of oil to the Burgan 118 well. Before an audience of Kuwaitis and foreign dignitaries, Kuwait's oil minister Hamoud Rquba declared, "Our national resources are safe now ... and this waste is stopped forever."

A total of 732 wells were set ablaze, making the Kuwaiti oilfields the world's worst ecological disaster. The region had been in a state of perpetual nighttime, with Canadians and other foreign firefighters working under thick, oil-blackened skies — the result of tonnes of unburned oil and pollutants spewing into the atmosphere.

Canadian firefighters: helping to extinguish the 732 Kuwaiti oil wells set ablaze during the Gulf War.

Canadian expertise and equipment are also being used to help Qatar and Bahrain cope with the massive oil spill. A Canadian team of remote-sensing experts and a geographic information system were sent to the Gulf to help predict movement of the slick and to provide detailed assessments of its current and future environmental effects. Booms, skimmers and pumping equipment have also been offered, as well as training for local workers in the techniques of cleaning oil from waterfowl and wildlife trapped in the slick. Almost one year after the liberation of Kuwait, the region so devastated is, with help, slowly returning to life.

New Gun Control Legislation

Canada has a new gun control law that is accompanied by several amendments to the Criminal Code. Addressing the House of Commons, Justice Minister Kim Campbell said, "The strong parliamentary support for this legislation reflects Canada's unique firearms culture, in which many law-abiding citizens own weapons and use them responsibly."

Among the new provisions are stiffer requirements for obtaining a firearms acquisition certificate (FAC); an increase in the minimum age for gun ownership from 16 years to 18 years of age; and a mandatory 28-day waiting period for a more stringent screening of all FAC applicants.

New limitations have also been imposed on high fire-power arms. Proposed regulations will limit the capacity of cartridge magazines; all semi-automatic handguns will be limited to 10 shots; and all centrefire semi-automatic rifles and shot guns will be limited to five shots.

All firearm owners must meet new regulations for safe storage, which are dependant on the degree of security required for the type and nature of the firearm. Gun collectors or owners may be required to consent to periodic inspections to ensure they are adhering to the guidelines.

Advocates of stricter firearms legislation hailed the passage of the bill as a moral victory.

Ole! Canada Pavilion Complete

Canada's pavilion at Expo '92 is now complete. The zinc-clad building, which will shimmer in the sun's rays, rises 27 m high and occupies an area of 4 200 m². It houses interactive displays run by the federal, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec governments. Through its theme "Discover Canada — Discover a New World," the pavilion highlights Canadian innovations in science and technology, and the country's history, people and land. A 15-minute IMAX film of Canada shown on a screen 24 m by 33 m will be a major public attraction; so, too, will be the restaurant with authentic Canadian food and the Inuit crafts centre run by the Northwest Territories government.

Special areas have been set aside for business and company visitors to meet with their Canadian counterparts in a relaxed informal atmosphere.

Expo '92 in Seville, Spain, opens April 20 and runs until October 12.

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