

In Chapter 4 of Agenda 21, governments pledge to "consider how economies can grow and prosper while reducing the use of energy and materials and the production of harmful materials". Some initiatives described in the section of this report on environmentally sound technology indicate how new technologies and processes can contribute to achieving this goal.

National Policies and Strategies to Encourage Changes in Consumption

Chapter 4 covers such issues as greater efficiency in the use of energy and resources, minimized generation of wastes, assistance to individuals in environmentally sound purchasing decisions, increased environmental content in government purchasing, and moves toward environmentally sound pricing.

Examples of all these activities exist in Canada, however, more progress has been achieved in changing institutional and industrial consumption than in changing the habits of individuals and households.

Canadians are finding ways to minimize the generation of both bulk wastes and specific pollutants. The federal government's pollution prevention strategy promotes the adoption of processes, practices, materials, and products that avoid or minimize the creation of pollutants and waste. The federal and provincial governments are continuing work toward the goal of reducing solid and packaging waste sent to disposal by 50 percent of 1988 levels by the year 2000. The latest figures from the National Solid Waste Inventory indicated a 13-percent reduction in municipal solid wastes from 1992.

Many measures have been aimed at industry and government because of their high consumption of energy, raw materials, and other products. Making production more efficient is a means of making overall consumption more sustainable. The Burnside Industrial Park in Nova Scotia is an illustration of the efforts being made to improve material-use efficiency. At Burnside, small businesses are using wastes generated by other companies inside the park. These wastes would otherwise have gone to landfill. Most provincial governments and the federal government have also instituted environmentally friendly procurement policies.

The federal and provincial governments have signed pollution prevention agreements with the motor vehicle manufacturing, dry-cleaning, metal finishing, and printing and graphics sectors. These commit companies to verifiable reductions in the generation, use, and release of specific substances. Pollution prevention efforts such as these also improve the efficiency of Canada's consumption of materials.

Canadian governments also continue to assist individuals to make environmentally sound purchasing decisions. Terra-Choice Environmental Services is continuing the federal government's Environmental Choice Program, evaluating products and providing information to Canadian consumers through its EcoLogo™ label. In addition, under the Energy Efficiency Act, the federal government requires energy efficiency information labels on some energy-using products.

In Quebec, mandatory deposit for single-use beer and soft-drink bottles has made it possible to recover nearly 73 percent of containers on the market. That amounted to 31,100 tonnes or 741 million containers in 1994 (most recent data available).