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SSEA'S COMMENTS ABOUT POSSIBLE AIR POLLUTION IMPACT OF U. S. COAL CONVERSION PLANS

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mark MacGuigan, today expressed the hope that a United States' proposal for coal conversion would not stand in the way of co-operative efforts of both countries to reduce transboundary air pollution.

On March 6, President Carter submitted to the United States Congress a \$9.6 billion proposal which seeks to decrease United States' reliance on imported oil by accelerating the conversion of some oil-fired electrical generating plants to coal. The President's announcement indicates that increased air pollution loadings and increases in acid rain will result from these conversions. A \$400 million grant fund is proposed to help offset such an increase.

In commenting on the announcement, Mark MacGuigan said he was disappointed the United States was not proposing to undertake stronger environmental measures which would reduce transboundary air pollution as part of the coal conversion programme. "I can readily appreciate the United States' desire to decrease reliance on imported oil, and that increased use of coal could be an important part of such a policy. At the same time, I cannot help but be very concerned about any step which would lead to an increase in transboundary air pollution at a time when both countries have recognized a need to reduce it. This is the objective of the discussions taking place between both Governments to develop a co-operative air quality agreement. Both Governments also committed themselves at the June 1979 Tokyo Summit Conference to increase use of coal without damage to the environment."

Mark MacGuigan also indicated, however, that he was heartened by some aspects of the President's announcement. "Mr. Carter has clearly stated that he considers acid rain a serious problem requiring attention, and has asked the Congress to address it in its current session. This indicates the United States shares Canada's concern about this problem, and is seeking ways to deal with it."

Mark MacGuigan said the State Department and other U. S. agencies have undertaken to consult with Canada as details of the coal conversion programme develop. "I hope that in this way we will be able to do everything we can to ensure that the transboundary air pollution problem does not get significantly worse as both countries consider measures to improve it."

Canadian concern that coal conversion plans should be accompanied with strong environmental measures to respond to the transboundary air pollution problem was communicated to the United States Government at a meeting of officials in Washington February 29. Canada has also sought assurances that this problem will be considered in any coal conversion programme which eventually emerges.