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NEWS RELEASE

MAY 17 2004

Canada Must Build On Toxics Treaty

As people around the world celebrate the entry into force today of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), Canadian NGOs are urging the federal government to take full advantage of the Conventions' obligations to protect human health and environment by demonstrating leadership in its implementation efforts.

The Stockholm Convention bans or restricts the use of twelve chemical contaminants, including PCBs, dioxins, and DDT. The chemicals have been linked to a variety of health problems, including cancer, and damage to peoples' immune systems. Although it was signed in 2001, the Convention had to wait for more than 50 countries to officially ratify it before the terms of the convention could take effect.

Canada was a key participant in negotiating the treaty. Canadian data showed that many of the chemicals dealt with under the Convention have been showing up in alarming amounts in people and the environment, particularly in the Canadian Arctic. Canadian NGOs and indigenous peoples took an active part in the negotiations leading to the signing of the convention. Now Canada must fulfill its obligations under the treaty, which will require a good hard look at the effectiveness of the current national regime on toxic substances, and at what can be done to improve it, through the development of a national implementation plan.

"The entry into force of the Stockholm Convention is a great start," says Karen Wristen, Executive Director of the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee. "Unfortunately, it does not mean we can relax. Potentially hazardous chemicals are still threatening Canadians. Canada must act to add these chemicals to the Stockholm Convention." Canada's domestic regime does not currently outline how it will identify new POPs. Chemicals that are prime candidates for addition to the Stockholm Convention include the pesticide Lindane, and a class of chemicals

known as brominated flame retardants, which are used in many daily products including electronic equipment, clothes, furniture and automobile parts.

“Canada has taken a leadership role in this convention,” says Paul Muldoon, Executive Director of the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “We’re asking for that leadership to continue. Not only should Canada take steps to add more chemicals to the convention, but it is time that significant resources be directed at safe alternatives to POPs to ensure that the dependency on POPs producing technologies like incinerators are stopped.”

Canada's leadership on POPs can be further demonstrated by injecting additional funding into the Canada POPs fund and other programs designed to help other countries deal with their chemical legacies. The Convention provides developing countries with the money they need to get rid of stockpiled chemicals, and to replace the use of harmful chemicals with other tools.

“We should also look in our own back yard,” says Morag Carter of the David Suzuki Foundation. “While many pollutants make their way to Canada from distant countries, we could still stand to clean up our own act, particularly in the area of incineration. Incineration technology is a known source of dioxins, furans and other hazardous chemicals.”

"Industrialized countries created these "dirty dozen" chemicals and we have a responsibility to eliminate them from agricultural pesticides, consumer products, industrial discharges and stockpiles." says Julia Langer of World Wildlife Fund Canada. "Taking personal action to reduce exposure is also important, especially for children and pregnant women."

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