

News Release

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Canada loses lead on toxics action

Canadian environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are calling on the federal government to meet its obligations under an international convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The government signed the Stockholm Convention a year ago today, but has still not come up with a plan on how it will take the action needed to eliminate the toxic chemicals from the Canadian environment.

“Canada showed leadership during the negotiations for this convention,” says Morag Carter of the International POPs Elimination Network. “Now the federal government is dragging its feet. This is not a good example to set for other countries.”

Environmental groups around the world are pressing their respective countries to sign, ratify, or take further steps on the POPs treaty as part of an international day of action. Eight countries have ratified the treaty so far. It takes ratification by fifty countries to bring the convention into force.

“Countries around the world followed the lead of Canada in these matters,” notes Paul Muldoon, Executive Director of the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “Canada should not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. If Canada is not treating this as an urgent matter, other governments feel less pressure too.”

The convention is aimed at ultimate elimination of POPs, including dioxins and furans, PCBs and DDT. Many of the substances named in the convention have been showing up in alarming rates in parts of Canada, particularly in the Arctic, raising fears for the health of local people and the environment. POPs are known to be associated with industrial processes and activities such as incineration and the use of pesticides. The Stockholm Convention promotes opportunities to assess and implement safe alternatives to these practices.

Canadian environmental NGOs, concerned that implementation of the convention in Canada is losing momentum due to the reluctance of the Canadian government to recognize Canadian sources of POPs, have called on Minister of Environment David Anderson to address a major source of new POPs in Canada at the Magnola plant in Asbestos Quebec. “Canadian action taken under the Convention should include stopping the POPs emissions of the Magnola plant in Asbestos, Quebec. This magnesium production plant is emitting 21kgs of hexachlorobenzene, 3kgs of PCBs and 85mg of dioxins and furans on a yearly base. This is unacceptable” said Stephane Gingras of Great Lakes United.

“When Minister Anderson signed and ratified the Convention in Stockholm, he spoke eloquently of his commitment to ensure 50 countries would ratify by the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg at the end of August this year,” said Angela Rickman, of the Sierra Club of Canada. “Since then, however, we have seen Canada take no leadership internationally, and make no plans to implement domestically.”

“We are concerned that this is becoming a pattern in international agreements,” adds Karen Wristen of the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee (CARC). “The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change is unraveling. We must make sure the Canadian government does not allow the same thing to happen to the Stockholm Convention. Canadian Arctic communities remain at exceptional risk from environmental threats. It is incomprehensibly cynical for the Canadian government to claim a leadership role in the Stockholm Convention while taking no steps to address the danger to its own people and environment.”

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For more information on POPs and activities on the International Day of Action, visit www.ipen.org

Also visit websites for other NGOs participating in the Day of Action:
Reach for Unbleached (British Columbia), www.rfu.org