

## Newsletter July 1997

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### **CAPE Co-sponsors International Conference on Water Pollution and Health**

CAPE joined its US counterpart, the National Association of Physicians for the Environment, in co-sponsoring this important conference, which was held in Chicago 22 to 24 May 1997. NAPE organized the highly successful meeting, which featured presentations by many medical organizations as well as technical lectures and featured speakers. The final outcome of the meeting was a proposal to establish a (U.S.) National Council on Water and Health. Dr. Len Landry will represent CAPE on this body.

The purpose of this meeting was to establish water quality as a contemporary (rather than historical) health concern, to identify current issues and gaps in knowledge on water quality and health, and to lay the foundation for a broad-based coalition between physicians and water quality professionals to address related issues. Not explicitly stated but underlying every aspect of the meeting was the desire to return the attention of physicians back to water issues after years of perceived separation and lack of interest following control of more obvious public health problems and the professionalization of water quality management under engineering and microbiology professionals.

The pre-meeting activities began on 21 May with a tour of the Jardine Water Purification Plant in Chicago, largest in the world and rated at 1.4B gallons/day. NAPE's annual meeting followed that evening and reviewed progress to date, particularly with respect to leadership in its conferences and to NAPE's internal development.

The first session was an overview of the problem and made the following critical points:

- Recognized pathogens constitute a small fraction of agents of waterborne disease: new methods are identifying numerous other agents and distinct varieties of known pathogens that were previously unrecognized.
- Although water supplies have been acceptably safe for the generally well population with intact immunity, current levels of microbiological safety are not protective for immunocompromised-consumers, which now constitute about 1% of the population.

- The Milwaukee cryptosporidiosis outbreak was a wake-up call that the current system does not guarantee protection, even when it functions to current standards.
- Watershed management, involving land use and protection at the source and upstream from intakes, has become compromised by, development, intensive agricultural practices, clearcutting in national forests, and surface runoff); this places a much heavier load on water treatment facilities and reduces the margin of safety.
- Worldwide, water quality is declining in safety and there is little economic incentive or political will to upgrade deteriorating infrastructure.
- Concern over trihalomethanes has called into question the safety of chlorination without weighing the small magnitude of risk against the much larger risk from inadequate disinfection; alternative methods of disinfection and water treatment are available but at much greater cost and without the same level of experience and confidence for protection against microbiological hazards.

The second panel used waterborne Cryptosporidiosis as a model for demonstrating the uncertainties, difficulties in identification and surveillance, and clinical problems associated with "emerging" waterborne infection, some of them only recently recognized as pathogens.

The third panel addressed chemical contamination, with an emphasis on nitrates, PCBs, mercury, and products of disinfection; endocrine disruptors, persistent organic pollutants, and lead (from soldered joints in pipes).

The fourth panel dealt with the potential role and interests of organized medicine, with contributions from several such groups. CAPE was represented by Dr. Len Landry, who spoke eloquently on water quality, acid deposition, and the integrity of lakes in eastern Ontario. I also made the following points:

- Physicians are trained primarily to treat sick people.
- Prevention is hard to do and even harder to evaluate.
- Physicians interested in and trained in prevention and who are committed to it in practice are at a serious disadvantage because of financial and health care organization arrangements and that this is getting worse under managed health care.
- Lack of prevention content in medical curriculum is a result, not a cause, of these facts.

Another was an overview of drinking water treatment. Major points of interest raised included:

- Alternative technologies to chlorination are becoming more feasible and almost within reach of municipal (large) water systems, particularly ozonation, granulated activated charcoal, and membrane dialysis.
- The limiting factor in "reengineering" water quality is cost, since municipal governments face severe revenue constraints.

- There is a great and competing need to upgrade and replace the distribution infrastructure, in the US.
- "Waterworks" have become a sophisticated water supply industry which has had to learn effective risk communication, to make strategic alliances, and to act assertively to prevent degradation of watersheds.

When the interests of public health authorities have conflicted with those of environmentalists, it has usually been an issue of accuracy of information, water flow and decision issues, and water disinfection (chlorination); there is general agreement between them on watershed conservation, biodiversity, and protection of acute human health hazards due to microbiological contamination.

The last panel dealt with international issues, reflecting concerns in Switzerland, Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Argentina. Dispersed among these panels were a number of featured speakers.

The final sessions dealt with the creation of a National Council on Water Pollution and Health, essentially recruiting and making common cause for physicians and water quality managers. This was accepted and will be managed by NAPE out of its office. Canada, and CAPE will be represented by Len Landry.

Submitted by: Dr. Tee L. Guidotti, 27 May 1997

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### **CAPE Listserv Now Operating: "capenews-I"**

We now have our new listserv. It is called capenews-I (that last character is an "ell", and its full address is capenews-I@web.net. To log in, anyone just has to type an email message that says: subscribe capenews-I@web.net and presto! ... they're in (Warren Bell must approve each person - so be on your best behaviour).

Anyone with an email address and Internet access can log into the listserv - that's the beauty and simplicity of it. There is no cost to members for subscribing.

Some comments on posting messages. Only messages that should go to everyone should be posted. Anything personal or better handled by direct email should go that route. Try to keep messages under a couple of paragraphs, and PLEASE don't post long documents unless it is critical for everybody to see them in their entirety. It's better to summarize or precis a document and then tell other subscribers to contact you directly if they want the full text (or else THEY can tell you to post it in full).

Submitted by: Dr. Warren Bell, 2 April 1997

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## **Canadian Environmental Legislation**

### **Canadian Endangered Species Act**

In December 1996, CAPE sent a 46 page submission on biodiversity, as it relates to Canadian endangered species legislation, to the federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

CAPE covered and supported the concerns of members of the Endangered Species Coalition, using evidence we gleaned from CAPE background papers and other sources. Our submission also included recommendations that support positions which have since been voiced by the Endangered Species Coalition.

In addition, we brought in some even more specialized issues. These include food plants and medicinal plants, plant biodiversity, sustainability of agriculture, phytochemicals or "nutraceuticals," biotechnology, agricultural livestock, anthropogenic toxic chemicals, endangered psyches (ecopsychology), as well as damage to species from unsupported and uncontrolled use of plants and animal parts for so-called medicinal purposes.

The intent of the Act reads well but the Act itself looks weak and indecisive. The effectiveness of the Act depends largely on to what extent the National Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, between the federal and provincial governments, will be put into effect.

From "Animals exist on a wing and a prayer," an editorial on federal Environment Minister Sergio Marchi's tabling of the country's first Endangered Species Act: "So far however it's still a dangerously weak document that fails to protect animals that cross provincial or national borders; most important, critical habitats." Editorial in Vancouver Sun, December 31/96)

### **Toxic Substances Management Policy**

Environment Canada's office of Pollution Prevention has issued a Toxic Substances Management Policy (TSMP). To date, CAPE's response on toxics and on CEPA (Canadian Environmental Protection Act) has been on an individual basis rather than in a general CAPE submission. Peter Carter sent in a ten page submission commenting on the goals and processes of the TSMP, paragraph by paragraph. He did not submit on specific toxics. The following two extracts serve to show the policy has the right directions, but the means of implementation may be lacking.

"I strongly endorse the following in applying the policy, which need to be legislated rather than only included as policies or guidelines:

- POLLUTION PREVENTION
- PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH
- RESPONSIBILITY AS POLLUTER PAYS
- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION and INTERVENOR FUNDING PROVISION
- PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

"In addition, a TSMP will need to address a problem frequently encountered in environmental protection. This is the sheer number of agencies that have numerous and various interests and responsibilities, which all impact on the management of toxics. The result has often been that common management goals, criteria and methods are not established, i.e., management, in effect, does not occur or occurs at best inefficiently."

This has been recognized by some for many years. According to Baker (1976:247-248), in *Resource and Environmental Management in Canada: Addressing Conflict and Uncertainty* (Bruce Mitchell, ed.), "the division of responsibility into watertight, sectoral compartments means that the administration is neither able to perceive the nature of an ecological problem, nor is it able to do anything meaningful about it." This is described as an "Administrative Trap" with reference to "the way that the structure of an administration largely determines its capacity to deal with interdisciplinary problems, however devoted or talented its staff."

"There are two ways of looking at Canada. To the unfettered eye, ours is a country of unspoiled glacial lakes and mountain goats perching where mountain goats will. To the 150,000 Canadians who work in the field, our natural beauty exists in a delicate balance - those lakes are just as likely to be cesspools of toxins and that mountain goat probably perches on a contaminated site. It's now widely recognized that Canada is falling behind the US. in terms of environmental policy."

A quote from Greenpeace? Think again. This comes from the April 1996 issue of *Canadian Business*. Canada has a "brain drain" in the area of environmental technology because policies and planning are not supporting the growth of environmental technology at home as is happening in many countries abroad. "The field is growing domestically at about 3% to 5% a year," says George Powell, CH2M Gore & Storrie's senior vice-president. "But offshore it's booming - growing at about 10% to 15%."

As we said in our toxics submission:

In some situations Canada may actually lose out in short term economic opportunities from monitoring and pollution reduction technologies as well as the long term economic benefits that will accrue to clean industries and cost saving from environmental health benefits.

If the provinces and the federal government enact complementary legislations, and their management policies are harmonized, there is no reason why protection of endangered species and control of toxic substances cannot be realized in Canada. However, if the legislations are not harmonized, environmental protection will continue to lose out to courtroom showdowns and jurisdictional wrangling.

### **Climate Change**

According to national media (December 8 & 9/96), a report prepared for the federal-provincial meeting of environment and energy ministers said that Canada's voluntary program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is failing. The 50-member committee included university scientists, government, and industry brought together by the Royal Society of Canada and Environment Canada. The report stressed that reducing emissions is not only feasible but could have benefits for both the economy and the environment.

## **Ozone Depleting Substances**

Record extensive "ozone holes" occurred over Antarctica in 1993, 1994, and unpredicted in the spring of 1995. In 1996 from January to March a northern hemisphere "ozone hole" opened over much of Europe, the Ukraine and Russia. The New Scientist editorial of March 26/96, "Disaster in the Stratosphere," said about these developments, "dramatic new uncertainty has emerged about the prospects for the ozone layer over Europe."

## **St. Lawrence River Action Plan**

About 2300 industries dump about 5.5 billion litres of waste water into the St. Lawrence daily, much of it untreated (Smith 1994:233). The river contains over 50,000 anthropogenic chemicals. Animal wastes, and agricultural pesticides and fertilizers also contribute to the pollution of the river water. The ST. LAWRENCE BELUGA WHALE has high concentrations of organic compounds including mirex, DDT and PCBs. The whales are listed as endangered and have been found to be affected by hepatitis, bladder cancer and perforated ulcers.

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## **CAPE'S Role and Mission**

CAPE has made some valuable connections with the federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, the Endangered Species Coalition, the Plants Subcommittee of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Toxics Caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network, and the Federal Office of Pollution Prevention. These connections should be very rewarding as the association grows.

My personal input to CAPE is that our challenge is to find a role in the public consultation process which, to the credit of Environment Canada, is being used in drawing up and implementing new environmental legislation. It would be helpful both to Environment Canada and to CAPE's development for CAPE to have a role. This role means more than endorsing positions arrived at by other interest groups, but is not public activism, which is being done by other national environmental groups. I see two sub-roles for CAPE in the public consultation process. First, we could provide information supported by scientific consensus on the issues as they impact on the environment and health. The second sub-role is to bring to the public process our training in the Western medical model: our skills in ethics, diagnosis, prognosis, and management.

Obviously no one wants the St. Lawrence beluga whale to suffer out another decade or two as swimming toxic waste dumps and then to join the many species never ever to be seen again. This is the current diagnosis and prognosis of wildlife experts on the beluga. This would be a disgrace to the values of Canadians. Every contribution towards a solution could give the beluga and us a little more time for the remedies to be found.

Submitted by: Dr. Peter Carter 16 January 1997

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## Ma Santé

In cooperation with the Comité de santé environnementale du Québec and the University of Alberta Press, CAPE is revising a book entitled Ma Santé. The original book was written in French and covered a variety of topics related to air, water, food and land quality. The revised book will be an English version. A few new topics will be added, including many global environmental issues.

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## The International Society of Doctors for the Environment

ISDE is a federation of national groups, not a united organization with chapters. The International Society of Doctors for the Environment continues to grow by admitting new national organizations. Over time, the originally closely-knit group of German and Italian-speaking societies has had reduced influence (although it is still substantial) and the organization has moved toward a looser federation of national societies. The issues now facing ISDE are the following:

- What benefits are derived to the national associations from their membership in ISDE?
- How should the national associations relate to the ISDE and what are their obligations to ISDE?
- On what basis does ISDE speak for its member associations and when do the national associations speak for ISDE (and therefore one another)?
- How can ISDE balance its activist membership and its expert membership?

I will deal with each in turn:

National associations join ISDE for several reasons. Some, particularly those of former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, are reaching out for international recognition and to back out of historic isolation. Others, particularly those of developing countries, are seeking technical assistance and a means of anticipating the problems they must eventually come to grips with. It is not clear that ISDE can provide this at its current level of development. A few join to make the link evident between professional practice and professional responsibility. Still others do so primarily in order to support a global effort toward sustainable development and environmental integrity, to be achieved through social and political action. These groups are generally led by physicians who seek a role as activists in the environmental movement and the latter by physicians who seek to apply their expert, professional skills beyond the limited scope allowed by professional practice.

Like CAPE, ISDE has some members that are activist in orientation and others that are oriented more toward professional commitment. Like CAPE also, the difference between the two has little to do with content expertise (since committed activists do their homework) or commitment to issues (since the "professionals" are members in the first place because their concern goes far beyond their jobs). Unlike CAPE, however, this dimension has not been a source of strength for ISDE. There are few opportunities at the ISDE level for the mutually rewarding shared process of informal strategizing that goes on with CAPE. For example, the Swiss group recently participated in a demonstration that

blocked traffic through the St. Gotthard tunnel, to protest the environmental degradation of vehicular traffic. Not all members of the Directing Committee were comfortable with television coverage of doctors in white coats using stethoscopes, blocking trucks on the highway for notions of health that were hard to articulate. ISDE needs to figure out a way of balancing these two "cultures" and encouraging their balance with national organizations.

At the last ISDE meeting, on 25 May 1997 in Chicago, significant gains were made in balancing these "two cultures" and in putting into place more effective and professional management structures. ISDE serves as a structure for sharing ideas and support among its member national organizations. It also serves to validate the legitimacy of new national organizations, some of which are struggling under very difficult circumstances. These are very important functions. ISDE does least well when it tries to be a global organization and tries to launch its own special projects. The difficulties in doing this across national and cultural boundaries without a solid organizational structure are just too great at the present time.

What benefits does CAPE derive from belonging to ISDE? CAPE has benefited from comparing notes with other organizations, particularly its Swedish counterpart and the Natural Step. ISDE has given CAPE a leadership role in a worldwide movement and a perspective by which to judge its own role. CAPE, along with other similar member organizations, has been a stabilizing influence on ISDE as a whole. In so doing, it has helped to maintain ISDE as a world-wide physicians' movement growing in influence. ISDE retains the potential to be a significant environmental NGO of worldwide scope and deserves our support.