

# Canada should be envious of greener United States

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Pollution in Canada is getting worse. It is making Canadians very sick. And the federal government is to blame. Our yearly analysis of Environment Canada's own data (available at [www.pollutionwatch.org](http://www.pollutionwatch.org)) makes it clear that Canada's federal pollution policy continues to be an abject failure. This won't come as a surprise to Canadians who have been suffering through record numbers of smog days. The Ontario Medical Association reports that smog days in 2005 in the province have already nearly doubled the 2004 total, and that approximately 5,800 premature deaths a year can be attributed to poor air quality. In many parts of our country, smog days are the new normal.

Canada's record as one of the most polluting industrialized countries in the world has been well documented by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the federal Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development. And yet many Canadians continue to mistakenly believe that Canada is a force for environmental good on the international stage. Some comparisons with the United States are instructive. According to the NAFTA Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Canadian facilities reported a decrease of two per cent in air pollution emissions between 1995 and 2002. Over the same period, U.S. facilities reported a decrease of 45 per cent. In his response to our 2005 PollutionWatch report released last week, federal Environment Minister Stephane Dion does not deny these trends, but suggests they are attributable to a downturn in the U.S. economy and increased Canadian economic growth, particularly in the oil and gas sector. We respectfully disagree.

Every year, the CEC tracks pollutant releases for all U.S. states and Canadian provinces. Ontario inevitably ranks as the second- or third-worst polluting jurisdiction, competing with Texas, Ohio and Louisiana. And, on average, Canadian polluters release 20 per cent more per facility than those in the United States. The inescapable conclusion is that Canadian industries are dirtier and less efficient than their U.S. counterparts.

Further, though Canada's signing of the Kyoto Protocol was a positive step, the reality is that Canada's aggregate greenhouse-gas emissions have increased faster than any other G8 country in the past decade. Between 1990 and 2001, they climbed by 19 per cent, a full six per cent higher than the U.S. rate. Of the 29 OECD countries, Canada is 27th in energy use per capita, consuming almost double the OECD average. The economy in the United States, a non-signatory nation to Kyoto, is actually 33 per cent more energy-efficient than Canada's.

This should not be surprising. While Canada allocates some \$500 million for energy efficiency programs, such as the familiar EnerGuide, the U.S. 2005 Energy Policy Act allocates some \$2 billion U.S. in tax incentives to promote advanced energy-saving technologies and practices.

The United States is also typically more stringent in its environmental laws, relying on regulatory standards to further environmental objectives rather than the voluntary measures that pervade the Canadian approach. For example, the U.S. has a set of legally enforceable National Ambient Air Quality Standards to protect public health and the environment from critical pollutants. In Canada, there is a patchwork of provincial initiatives that do not have the same regulatory approach to target reductions. The same holds true for water.

Throughout the 1990s, many thought that both countries had forgotten about the Great Lakes. Programs drifted and resources were scarce. In mid-2004 however, U.S. President George W. Bush declared the Great Lakes a "national treasure" and directed his senior officials to hold meetings in the Great Lakes area to draft a restoration plan.

The effort is due to be released in December. In the meantime, two bills continue to work their way through Congress with broad bipartisan support that will, if passed, allocate more than \$4 billion U.S. for Great Lakes clean-up. In Canada, the five-year Great Lakes program was renewed at \$40 million. Barely enough to keep the doors open.

Polls consistently demonstrate the willingness of Canadians to do more, spend more and sacrifice more for the environment. However, the federal government persists in digging us into a deeper environmental hole.

Although some of Canada's environmental problems are exacerbated by activities south of the border, like smog and transboundary air pollution, it is very difficult to negotiate with the U.S. until our own house is in order. As long as we are the pot calling the kettle black, we hand the U.S. an excuse for further inaction.

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