Environment Canada Encyclopedia Article

Environment Canada

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Environment Canada

Canada's Department of the Environment, commonly known as Environment Canada, was founded in 1971. It was created to bring the different aspects of Canadian environmental policy, which had until then been split between several different departments, under the control of one main body. Environment Canada has primary, but not exclusive, control of implementing Canada's environmental policies (the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, for instance, still has control of fisheries protection).

Environment Canada has three main areas of responsibility:

- Weather and environmental prediction—collecting environmental data and forecasting weather, as well as researching climate change and other human environmental impacts
- Clean environment—developing pollution standards and controlling the use of toxic substances
- Nature—conserving biological diversity, primarily through parks and the protection of endangered species

Environment Canada also has responsibility for upholding Canada's end of international agreements, and working with the environmental agencies of other nations on issues of regional or global importance. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation, for example, is an organization established by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States to address regional environmental concerns, help prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts, and promote the effective enforcement of environmental law.

In contrast to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which has complete control over the implementation of American environmental legislation, Environmental Canada shares its responsibilities with the provincial governments. However, the distinction between what falls under federal authority and what belongs to the provinces is rarely clear, especially when it comes to environmental protection.

In an effort to minimize overlap, the Canadian federal government typically limits its involvement in environmental protection to a few key areas where its constitutional authority is clear and undisputed. Those areas include national parks, aboriginal title lands, inland and offshore fisheries, and issues of "national concern," such as toxic substances and endangered species, and are the focus of Environment Canada's authority. Otherwise, environmental protection responsibilities such as assessments, inspections, and enforcement generally fall to the provinces.

SEE ALSO U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY.

Internet Resource

Environment Canada Web site. Available from http://www.ec.gc.ca.