



Media Release

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Immediate Release

Citizens Across Canada Urge Ministers to Adopt Federal Toxics Law Changes

Toronto - The heads of over 30 civil society organizations from across Canada presented the federal ministers of Environment (Hon. Catherine McKenna) and Health (Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor) with draft legislation amending the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), and urged the ministers to introduce the amendments in the Fall 2018 session of Parliament to better protect human health and the environment from toxic substances.

“CEPA has not been amended in two decades, and the government’s June 2018 response to a parliamentary standing committee’s 2017 report on hearings conducted in 2016 on CEPA, raised concerns whether Canadians will see amendments to the law before 2020”, said Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director and Counsel at the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA).

The amendments presented to the ministers by the groups follow a petition tabled in Parliament earlier this month signed by over 11,000 Canadians urging changes to CEPA, as well as a report by the federal environment commissioner on inadequate toxic substances enforcement under CEPA.

The amendments address five areas of concern with CEPA that were raised during standing committee hearings and reflected in the committee’s report, but not necessarily supported in the government’s June 2018 response to the report. These include: (1) control over endocrine disrupting substances; (2) establishment of enforceable national ambient air quality standards; (3) protection of vulnerable populations from toxic substances; (4) substitution of safer alternatives to toxic substances; and (5) civil enforcement of CEPA by the public in the courts.

“These five issues were recurring concerns identified by civil society witnesses appearing before the standing committee”, said Joe Castrilli, a CELA lawyer, who drafted the amendments.

“Hormone-related cancers and chronic diseases are increasing, especially in younger Canadians. These CEPA amendments would enable modern systematic science to address endocrine disrupting and other toxic substances, and to shift toward healthiest options across the board”, said Dr. Meg Sears, Chair of Prevent Cancer Now.

“Laws controlling toxic substances need to be updated more frequently than once every twenty years. These amendments address overdue issues like civil enforcement of the law’s requirements by the public and provide better opportunities for public involvement in the decision-making process concerning these substances”, said Erica Stahl, Lawyer, West Coast Environmental Law.

“Establishing enforceable national ambient air quality standards as these amendments propose will contribute to a reduced disease burden for people suffering from respiratory and other ailments caused by air pollution”, said Gordon Dalzell, Chair, Saint John Citizens Coalition for Clean Air.

“A key to protecting vulnerable populations, like pregnant women, children, and workers, from exposure to harmful chemicals is to require industry, with government oversight, to examine, develop, and substitute non-toxic alternatives”, said Rohini Peris, President, Environmental Health Association of Quebec.

“The Government should seize this opportunity to make important and much needed reforms to federal environmental law enacted to protect the environment and human health from toxic substances”, stated Joe Castrilli.

The amendments, and the letter sent to the ministers explaining the rationale for them, may be found on the CELA website.

- 1) Letter to Hon. Catherine McKenna and Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor at <https://www.cela.ca/letter-amending-CEPA>
- 2) Amendments to CEPA at <https://www.cela.ca/proposed-amendments-CEPA>

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