

Ontario's environmental woes spark carbon tax debate

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In response to a Statistics Canada's Report of Environmental Sustainability Indicators released last week, politicians are proposing solutions to correct southern Ontario's pollution problems.

The third annual report addresses three separate pollution indicators, which monitor air quality, including ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter; greenhouse gas emissions, a major contributor to global warming; and freshwater purity, a sustainability gauge of aquatic habitats.

The report showed that ground-level ozone, a major contributor to smog, increased by 12 per cent nationally between 1990 and 2005.

Although the surge has begun to stabilize across the country, Rob Smith, director of Environment and Statistics for Statistics Canada indicated that since 2004, greenhouse gases in have escalated in southern Ontario and southern Quebec.

Smith explained that ground-level ozone linger around areas local to their producers, whereas greenhouse gases affect communities both near and far from their sources of production. Greenhouse gases are measured by the amount of toxins in the air, most prominently carbon dioxide.

The Green Party of Canada has proposed a solution to the problem through the introduction of a carbon tax, which has already been instated in Quebec. As a cornerstone of the Green's plan for climate change, the tax would put an additional cost on the price of gasoline.

"Our idea is that it would be a national scheme, where carbon related taxes are rated at \$50 per ton, and basically that ends up to be about 12 cents at the pump, per litre," press secretary, Camille Labchuk, said from Ottawa.

However, consumers are not the only people who would be hit. The Green Party of Ontario's platform involves penalizing the corporate sector through the principle of paying for what you burn, not for what you earn.

"We're going to tax the heck out of (companies) who are actually using wasteful fuels," said Windsor West Green Party candidate Jason Haney.

"On the other hand, companies that decide to go green would actually get credit. We want to basically try to create an industry that is rewarded for adopting green values, and is actually compensated for it by providing rebates and tax credits, but we want to basically make it too expensive for companies that keep polluting," added Haney.

Windsor West MP, Brian Masse, believes the answer can be found through an alternative course of action.

"We actually believe in a different system, a cap and trade carbon exchange," Masse said. The strategy involves limiting the amount of emissions manufactures can produce.

Companies who meet targeted criteria would receive credit, which in turn can be sold to other emitters who breach proposed standards. If successful, the plan would have Canada producing a set and regulated quantity of emissions.

New emission policies would directly affect Windsor's industrial sector.

Daimler-Chrysler's senior manager of communications, Stuart Schorr, said that companies such as his have taken measures to combat pollution.

Chrysler's strategy includes improving vehicle's fuel economy, offering more fuel efficient choices in the marketplace, and reducing waste through better production practices.

Regarding the issue of a carbon tax though, Schorr said adamantly, "I would hate to have anything that makes it more expensive to do business in Windsor."

Green house gas emissions are only one environmental concern that plagues Canada.

Statistics Canada's report also cited that only 44 per cent of Canada's fresh water is considered good or excellent, while 23 per cent is marginal or poor. The report marks phosphorus waste, a result of sewage, industrial waste, and agricultural run-off, as the main culprit.

Phosphorus waste caters to the growth of algae; its blooms pose health risks to human and animal life.

A detailed report of regional water quality is expected later this fall.

Pierre Sadik, spokesman for The David Suzuki Foundation, stated that it will not be easy to halt the "terribly troubling finding" because without government regulations there is no onus on individuals or companies to alter their aqua-waste management plans.

"The biggest thing that can be done is leadership by government at the national, provincial, and to some extent the municipal level," emphasized Sadik. "We need leadership from our politicians."

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