

**Explaining the Issues on Children's Health and Standard-Setting:
A Project to Build Upon CELA's and OCFP's Children's Health
and Environmental Standard-Setting Study**

Funding Proposal

to the

Laidlaw Foundation

Concerning

Children's Health and the Environment

Submitted by

Canadian Environmental Law Association

Ontario College of Family Physicians (Environmental Health Committee)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Overview to the Proposal	2
3. Project Components	3
3.1 Articles for Select Audiences	3
(a) Articles Targeted at Health Professionals	3
(b) An Article for Legal and Policy Journals	5
3.2 Uploading Study to the Internet	5
3.3 Drafting and Submitting Select Articles for Popular Magazines	5
3.4 Development of “Environmental Standard-Setting Guides”	6
4. Timelines	7
5. Budget	8
Appendix A - Research Team of Previous Study (Phase I)	10
Appendix B - Draft Table of Contents of Previous Study	11
Appendix C - <i>Curriculum Vitae</i> of the Co-Directors of the Project	13

1. Introduction

In the fall of 1998, the Laidlaw Foundation provided funding to the Resource Library for the Law and Environment to undertake research into the question of whether current standard-setting processes in Canada *intentionally* take into account, and incorporate, children's health issues in those processes. The work under the project is being undertaken by the Canadian Environmental Law Association and the Ontario College of Family Physicians (Environment Committee). A research team comprised of representatives from both organizations was formed and the research and drafting of the report began. The research team is outlined in Appendix A.

The study, tentatively entitled: *Children's Health and Environmental Standard-Setting: A Preliminary Analysis of the Adequacy of Standard-Setting Processes to Protect Children's Health*, has three overall objectives:

1. To provide a review of the evidence concerning the links between children's health and the exposure of environmental contaminants;
2. To review selected environmental standard-setting processes in Canada, with particular emphasis to Ontario processes, and to assess the extent to which such processes *intentionally* consider the issue of children's health in those processes. Reference is given to other jurisdictions, particularly to the United States, with respect to their efforts to explicitly incorporate children's health into environmental standard-setting; and
3. To provide recommendations concerning areas where further research is needed with respect to the first two objectives and with respect to what reforms or initiatives can now be undertaken to better incorporate children's health into environmental standard-setting processes.

The *Children's Health Study* is unique in a number of ways. First, it is founded upon the establishment of a productive partnership between health and legal professionals examining an area of mutual interest. Second, the study undertaken by the partnership provides perhaps the only comprehensive review of the issue to date. While the objectives of the study are stated above, one of the anticipated outcomes of the study is that the document will become both a resource to those in the field and a platform or basis to further law and policy reform in Canada.

From the fall of 1998, research and drafting of the study was undertaken. On April 26, 1999, a peer review workshop was convened to review the draft study. The workshop was attended by experts relating to environmental health, law and policy, environmental and children health advocacy, governmental agencies and related sectors. While the research team interpreted the peer review comments as supportive and constructive, considerable work was required to complete sections of the report that were not yet drafted as well as to respond to the comments

made during and after the peer review meeting. In fact, several peer review participants continued a dialogue with members of the research team well into the summer.

At the present time, the draft study is in the process of being completed. Throughout the spring and summer, two in-depth case studies were drafted. One case study pertaining to lead was available in draft at the peer review meeting while another full case study pertaining to pesticides has since been drafted. The time expected to complete certain research and drafting tasks, expand and complete case studies, verify references and better integrate parts of the study has taken longer than expected. However, it is anticipated that the study will be completed in its final form by November 30, 1999. The working Table of Contents is attached to this proposal as Appendix B.

To date, there has been no formal release of the *Study* to the media or public. However, the *Study* has already been a useful resource to some organizations that have taken advantage of the research team's expertise and observations. Further, the federal Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development has asked the research team to make a submission and appear as a witness before it in November pertaining to the Committee review of pesticides issues in Canada. It is anticipated that the *Study's* pesticides case study will be released or at least summarized during that presentation.

The proposal submitted herein is not intended to be a full report on the Children's Health Standard-Setting Study. Instead, it is anticipated that the report will be submitted at the end of November, 1999 with a final report to the foundation.

2. Overview to the Proposal

In anticipation of the completion of the report, this proposal is intended to build upon, and enhance, the objectives of the *Children's Health Study* described above. In effect, the *Children's Health Study* should be considered "Phase I" of the project with this proposal being considered "Phase II". It should be recalled that Phase I of the *Children's Health Study*, and its related case studies, are rather lengthy and technical analyses of children's health and environment issues and environmental standard-setting processes relating to children. While these documents could make important contributions to the field, such contributions will only be realized to the extent that the Phase I study is summarized and relayed to selected audiences.

This proposal outlines the Phase II part of the project which proposes a number of products that seek to relay the information and analyses in the *Study* to those selected audiences. More specifically, this phase of the project proposes to use the *Study*: (1) to develop three articles to be published in professional journals; (2) to "upload" the *Study* and the case studies to the internet to make the information available in an cost-effective manner; (3) to draft and submit at least two articles to popular magazines to relay the information in the study to a broader audience; and (4) to develop at least three "environmental standard-setting guides" directed to specific standard-setting processes.

The project components are outlined more specifically below.

3. Project Components

There are three project components proposed for this phase of the project.

3.1 Drafting and Submission of Articles for Professional Journals

(a) Articles Targeted at Health Professionals

Two articles are proposed to be written for a medical audience. They will be submitted to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)*, for the Education Section¹. They will be subject to peer review, and publication will be at the discretion of the editor. An approach to the editor was promising.² If not accepted, they will be submitted to the *Canadian Family Physician (CFP)*.

One important assumption is that the medical community is an important audience to receive information concerning children's environmental health. A 1992 Health Canada survey found that Canadians consider physicians the most credible source of environmental health information.³ Sanborn and Scott, in the *Canadian Family Physician*, reported that physicians were highly concerned about environmental health problems and that many patients had questions about the health effects of environmental exposures. Pregnant women, agricultural

¹ The Education section of *CMAJ* is wide ranging, presenting review articles, program descriptions, case reports and other papers such as Bioethics for Clinicians series that contribute to the professional development of practicing physicians. Although we can be flexible with respect to length and format, the main text of most submissions should be no longer than 2000 words; authors should also supply a brief summary of the article. All Education articles are peer reviewed.

² Dear Alan (If I may). Yes we are preparing a series on the environment and its effects on human health. We would welcome the contribution you suggest. You may wish to look at our hints for authors 'Writing for *CMAJ*' most easily found at <www.cma.ca/cmaj>. John

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³ Health and Welfare Canada. *An investigation of the attitudes of Canadians on issues related to health and the environment*. Ottawa: Decima Research; 1992.

workers and children were considered important at risk groups.⁴ A number of studies have demonstrated the lack of education and lack of accessible resources for physicians in environmental health. Self-ratings of knowledge were generally low.⁵

Although the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* ran a series of articles on children's environmental health in 1998,⁶ no journal with circulation to clinical physicians has carried such content.

Physicians are busy people, as are most professionals, and it is difficult to get their attention. It is submitted that an effective way to educate physicians about threats to children's health from environmental contaminants is through their widely circulated and widely read medical journals, such as *CMAJ* and *CFP*. This approach would be even more effective if the proposed articles were included in planned future editions focusing on environmental health. Immediate attention is required to meet the deadlines for these publications.

Article 1: Children's Health and Environmental Contaminants

An overview of environmental health problems facing children, with clinical and public health consequences, and an overview of why children are more vulnerable. The content will reflect chapter 2, Relationship Between Children's Health and Environmental Contaminants of the *Children's Health Study*. This article would alert physicians, as clinicians in their offices, emergency rooms etc, to the possibility of environmental agents as causes of or contributors to children's health problems, and would also enable physicians to educate their patients, or answer questions from their patients, about these issues.

Article 2: Case Studies

This article will consist of two case studies with relevance to clinical situations. It will review the environment health linkages, giving more detail than the overview in article 1. It will also give an overview of the structure, principles and adequacy of standard-setting processes in Ontario. The physician will be informed in more detail on the chosen topics, and the knowledge of the policy/regulatory aspects will equip physicians to be better advocates in their communities in the policy debate regarding children's environmental health.

⁴ Sanborn M, Scott F. Environmental health concerns in urban and rural family practice. *Canadian Family Physician* 1998; 44: 1466-1472.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Selected papers from What on earth?, a national symposium on environmental contaminants and the implications for child health. *Can. Journal Public Health* 1998; 89 (1).

(b) An Article for Legal and Policy Journals

Similar to the rationale for the articles targeted for health professionals, it is proposed that an article be drafted from the *Children's Health Study* that targets a legal and policy audience. In reviewing the study, it is apparent that not only is there little information on children's health and standard-setting, there is very little literature outlining standard-setting processes in Canada and even fewer sources providing any kind of critique.

It is proposed, therefore, that a law or policy journal article be submitted for publication based on the *Children's Health Study* that focuses on the nature, content and evaluation of standard setting processes in Canada as these relate to children's health. This article would summarize the basis for concern, namely, the link between children's health and the environment based on the work undertaken/supervised during Phase I by the Ontario College of Family Physicians (Environmental Health Committee) project partners. The thrust of the article, however, would focus on how standards are made and an analysis as to whether, and the manner in which, children's health is considered in those standard-setting processes.

It is anticipated that a number of journals would have interest in this proposal, including the *Journal of Environmental Law and Practice*. This is a popular journal that enjoys nation-wide attention. There are a number of other important journals that will be explored, including the university-based journals (such as the *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* and *University of Toronto Law Journal*) and policy analysis journal (such as the *Journal of Public Policy*).

It should be noted that drafting articles for legal and policy articles can be a long process. The project partners are committed to completing these tasks although the budget may not reflect the actual time resources needed to complete this project component.

3.2 Uploading Study to the Internet

The second component of the project is a modest proposal to upload the *Children's Health Study* and its related case studies to the internet. This work could include uploading the material to the website of the Canadian Environmental Law Association [www.web.net/cela] as well as to other appropriate websites.

An additional aspect to this component includes the development of internet links to and from other websites to ensure wide access to the study and to establish both reciprocal and useful links to websites of related interest. This aspect of the project requires some effort in determining appropriate sites and negotiating and developing the links between and among those sites.

3.3 Drafting and Submitting Select Articles for Popular Magazines

The third component of the project is to draft and submit at least two articles suitable for publishing in popular national magazines. It is expected that some or all of these articles would

be targeted at women and at parents (e.g., *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Living*, *Homemakers*, *Today's Parent*, etc.).

At this point in time, only preliminary contacts have been made with such magazines. It is anticipated that members of the research team would initially draft the articles, although it is expected that the advice and input of professional editors/writers may be needed to assist in the drafting of the end product.

3.4 Development of "Environmental Standard-Setting Guides"

The fourth component is directed to stakeholders in environmental standard-setting processes, and in particular, governmental agencies. Essentially, the "environmental standard-setting guides" are specific, brief documents (between 5 to 10 pages) that outlines the following:

- what the children's health issues are with respect to contaminants for which standards are being set;
- how the standard-setting process has worked in the past, including the strengths and weaknesses of the process;
- specific recommendations on how this process should include measures to protect children's health; and
- description of technical resource material available and other organizations working in the area.

In effect, this component applies the thinking and results of the study to some very specific processes that are now, or in the near future, taking place that will set new or revise existing standards.

It is intended that these brief but informative guides will be developed for three processes including: a guide for the development of Canada-Wide Standards under the Environmental Harmonization Accord (it is anticipated that such a standard will be developed for dioxin in early 2000); the upcoming (late 1999 or early 2000) consultations by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment on air standards for toxics; and the assessment or screening of priority substances under the new *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (Bill C-32).

It is anticipated that these guidelines would be distributed through the internet, environmental networks, government agency mailing lists and other such means.

4. Timelines

The time limes for the project components are as follows:

(a) Articles for Journals

Article 1 -	Full Draft	January 15, 2000
	Final Draft	One month after request
Article 2 -	Full Draft	January 15, 2000
	Final Draft	One month after request
Article 3 -	Full Draft	March 1, 2000
	Final Draft	One month after request

(b) Uploading Study to the Internet

Uploading <i>Children's Health Study</i>	January, 2000
Developing Links to Study	February, 2000

(c) Drafting and Submitting Select Articles for Popular Magazines

Article for 2 Popular Magazines	March, 2000
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(d) Developing "Environmental Standard-Setting Guides" April - June 2000

APPENDIX A

Research Team of Previous Study (Phase I)

Children's Health and Environmental Standard-Setting: A Preliminary Analysis of the Adequacy of Standard-Setting Processes to Protect Children's Health

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