

The National Committee on Environmental and Occupational Exposures A plea for bringing continuity and community to Cancer Prevention

In February, 2010 the last meeting of the National Committee on Environmental and Occupational Exposures was held. The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) that had inherited this Committee in 2007 (?) from their founding agency the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control had decided to reorganise its Action Group on prevention to exclude most further work pioneered by this Committee. This newly orphaned Committee is determined to continue to build on the progress they have made to demonstrate that many cancers are avoidable. Just as international interest in NCEO's work is growing and there are now tools emerging to assist the Canadian public that is demanding more action on cancer prevention, NCEO have been abandoned by the nongovernmental agency that controls Canada's cancer agenda.

In 19__ the Public Health Agency of Canada established the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control. Part of that control was considered to be the Primary Prevention of avoidable cancers. Indications had been growing world wide that some percentage of cancers is occupationally and environmentally induced and limiting exposures could result in fewer incidences of cancer. A Primary Prevention Action Group was created which in turn set up a National Committee on Environmental and Occupational and Exposures in January of 2003 made up of occupational, environmental, clinical, and academic and government experts with shared goals of promoting actions on environmental and occupational exposures in Canada in a variety of creative ways. In the ensuing _ years the NCEO undertook a number of projects.

The first of these was a review in 2006 of best practices entitled *Prevention of Occupational and Environmental Cancers in Canada: a Best Practices Review and Recommendations*. http://www.cancer.ca/canada-wide/about%20us/cw-our%20positions%20and%20perspectives/~media/CCS/Canada%20wide/Files%20List/English%20files%20heading/pdf%20not%20in%20publications%20section/NCEO%20Best%20Practices%20Review%20Final%20Report%20May2005%20-%20English%20%20pdf_27365318.ashx .

The report contained recommendations on; the identification and surveillance of hazards and exposed populations; the transmission of information through labelling and disclosure laws; education of the public, workers and communities; the reduction of exposures to carcinogens through substitution or process changes; and, legislation and regulation that contribute to cancer prevention. This report was disseminated to widely to federal, provincial and local public health and cancer control agencies and reinforced a few efforts underway and identified the large need to enable efforts across Canada. The NCEO developed work plans that built on the reports main recommendations that:

Environmental community profiles should be developed to allow us to easily find out the substances we are being exposed to in our communities, as well as the level and source of that exposure.

The committee urges municipalities and community groups to work together to eliminate pollutants from their environments.

Community bylaws preventing pollution should be passed.

Pollution prevention programs should be required for all facilities emitting carcinogens.

Employers and organizations should monitor and collect accurate data about the way they use and produce carcinogens.

A national program should be developed to audit reports and ensure that they are correct.

Companies using or producing carcinogens should be required to participate in pollution prevention programs.

Exposure limits in workplaces across Canada should be standardized and lowered as much as possible.

Where possible, manufacturers should be required to substitute safer materials for carcinogens.

The most ambitious of these projects was to support the work of CAREX (carcinogen exposure) Canada a **surveillance** project already underway in B.C. that had set out to replicate other CAREX databases in Europe and the US to develop estimates of the number of Canadians exposed to carcinogens in their workplace and community environments. The CAREX Canada team set out to undertake a series of interlocking projects to investigate carcinogens that Canadians are exposed to in workplace and community environments and committed to sharing the results of this research with policy makers, researchers, and health and safety professionals.

<http://www.carexcanada.ca/en/>

Another project initiated by NCEOE members was the development of an free accredited course for medical professionals Occupational and Environmental Cancer: Recognition and Prevention that taught primary health care professionals **clinical surveillance skills** how to take case histories, how to recognize occupational and environmentally induced cancers and sets out how this information can propel prevention activities to reduce risk. This course has now been transferred to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. http://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/prevent_cancer/

Another project Of the NCEOE Committee, lead by the Canadian Cancer Society, a Committee Member focused on consumer **right to know** about carcinogens in consumer products. This project researched how best to label products containing carcinogens and produced a report and held a workshop to focus the recommendations of this report. http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/Prevention/Environment%20and%20you/Product%20labelling.aspx?sc_lang=en

Planning for actions that **prevent asbestos exposures** was an early focus of the NCEOE. The Committee discovered there were barriers and data gaps standing in the way in Canada. The last activity of the committee will be a gathering of statisticians and occupational experts in Toronto in early March 2010 to examine best practices in victim databases and compensation and make recommendations for a Canada-wide harmonized system. Committee members in their personal capacity continue to endeavour to stop the unethical export of chrysotile asbestos to developing countries with few exposure controls leading to tragic health consequences for workers and their families.

Finally the NCEOE devised a number of projects to focus on and promote **toxic use reduction** across Canada. Committee members primarily in Ontario had established important precedents in the City of Toronto 2008 community right to know

Environmental Reporting and Disclosure By-law

http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_423.pdf

and the Province of Ontario's 2009 Toxic Reduction Act

<http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/toxics/index.php> .

NCEO Committee members had hoped to enable and support parallel community movements that led to these two pieces of preventative and precautionary law reform. In anticipation of being able to move their projects into programs, laws and policies across the country in 2009 the Committee commissioned research into a scan of all of the diverse practitioners in local community, environmental, First Nation, government, health and worker groups in Canada who are trying to achieve **toxic use reduction**. This scan also looked at all of the programs and laws at all levels of government that have some toxic reduction purposes and made recommendations as how to begin to address the inequities and lack of programs and access to toxic reduction tools in many locations and vulnerable sectors across Canada. The scan shows irrevocably that thousands of people are pursuing many diverse ways to limit their exposures to toxics and many of them have little or no support. Just as this report has been completed the reorganization of CPAC has meant that this scan will be parked on the CPAC www.cancerview.ca web site fulfilling knowledge transfer obligations but no further resources or support will be given to the development of this demonstrated community of interest. CPAC however will continue to fund the CAREX Canada efforts.

In 2009 CPAC determined that they were approaching the midway point in the five year mandate they were given as an arms length agency by Health Canada, CPAC created a CLASP funding program to enhance deliverable projects to mirror their mandate and to encourage partnerships with other chronic disease agencies. Numerous meetings were held across Canada to encourage applications for five projects to be funded for the remaining 2.5 years of their mandate. The NCEO Committee saw that they would need to submit proposals to ensure their work could continue. Forty one groups spent months preparing rigorous proposals and in the end none of the 5 proposals on environmental and occupational exposures were granted. CPAC reorganised future Action Groups around the five life style focused prevention projects.

Members of the NCEO have included:

Chairman Larry Stoffman - affiliation

Etc.