

Parliament must prioritize passage of strong environmental protection bill

CEPA modernization bill now reintroduced in the Senate must be strengthened and passed this year, groups say

For immediate release: February 9, 2022

OTTAWA/TRADITIONAL, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE ALGONQUIN ANISHNAABEG PEOPLE – Environmental and health groups are urging Parliament to prioritize [Bill S-5](#), introduced today in the Senate. The groups have long called for Canada’s most important environmental law, the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA), to be strengthened to better protect the environment and human health.

Bill S-5 was previously introduced in the House of Commons, as Bill C-28, in the last session of Parliament but was never debated, and died on the order paper. The groups are calling for Bill S-5 to be strengthened and passed without further delay.

CEPA is supposed to protect Canadians from harmful pollution and toxic chemicals, but it has not been updated in over 20 years. In 2017, the House Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development recommended strengthening CEPA. Consideration of these recommendations has now spanned three sessions of Parliament.

A modernized CEPA must be able to protect everyone in Canada from 21st-century environmental harm. All Senators and MPs must work together to make sure that the bill is improved and passes before the end of the year.

Groups are recommending amendments to Bill S-5 to make sure that CEPA contains an unqualified right to a healthy environment, that there are no loopholes for substances of the highest risk to remain a threat to the public, and that there are no delays in assessing the risk of dangerous chemicals, among other improvements.

Canadians cannot wait any longer for Parliament to bring CEPA into the 21st century and finally join other countries in recognizing the human right to a healthy environment in federal law.

Environmental and health groups urge the House Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to initiate an early consideration of the bill while the Senate debates and votes on this legislation to ensure a strong CEPA becomes law as soon as possible.

Dr. Elaine MacDonald, Ecojustice Healthy Communities program director said:

“CEPA reform is urgently needed to protect Canadians – especially the most vulnerable in our society – from dangerous levels of toxic pollution and chemicals. An outdated law means that people in Canada, unlike 156 countries worldwide, do not have the legal right to a healthy environment.

“Senators and MPs must make CEPA reform a top priority in Parliament and must move quickly to pass a strong and effective law that protects the public from 21st-century threats.”

Cassie Barker, Environmental Defence Toxics Senior Program Manager said:

“The toxic chemicals found in our air, water, food and products threaten Canadians and it’s past time to improve the legislation that prevents harm to our health and the environment.

“We need to heed the science on toxic chemicals, and this legislation needs to be improved so that Indigenous, racialized and low-income communities are no longer the most exposed to these hazards. When we need to act to prevent environmental harms, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions or banning plastics – it’s done under this Act. The stronger it becomes, the better we can tackle our most pressing pollution problems.”

Lisa Gue, David Suzuki Foundation national policy manager said:

”Bill S-5 would recognize the human right to a healthy environment for the first time in federal law, a critical paradigm shift that reinforces other overdue updates to CEPA. While it’s encouraging that government is moving quickly to revive the bill after it died on the order paper last session of Parliament, as is, the bill isn’t perfect. To set us up for success as we tackle the climate and nature crises, this Parliament – both House and Senate – must prioritize the bill, strengthen it and pass it into law.”

Jennifer Beeman, Executive Director of Quebec Breast Cancer Action, said:

“Canadians and First Nations communities know that we have a serious problem with toxic exposures in Canada. Flame retardants and PFAS in furniture and clothing, BPA in plastics, cash receipts and can linings, phthalates in air fresheners, fabric softeners, perfumes and cosmetics, to name just a few, have all been shown to interfere with biological processes in ways that produce serious harms, including neurological and reproductive disorders and cancers. What citizens don’t understand is why we have all these problems. Our regulatory system for toxic substances has failed us badly, but if this bill is strengthened and passed, the federal government has a real opportunity to protect the environment and the health of citizens. We must absolutely get this reform right.”

Jane McArthur, Toxics Campaign Director at Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) said:

“Today’s environmental health realities must be reflected in legislation to be protective and preventive. For the present and future health of people living and working in Canada, we need meaningful recognition of a human right to a healthy environment, a bill that will close the loopholes on toxic substances and remove barriers to citizens bringing forward concerns about toxic exposures. We need to think for the long-term. Action on CEPA reform now is action for the future of public health and environmental justice.”

Marc-André Viau, director of government relations at Équiterre, said:

“Stronger environmental laws make for healthier communities: the two are intricately connected. Updating the Canadian Environmental Protection Act must be a priority for this session of parliament to ensure we have the legislative framework in place for the transition to a green economy.”

About:

[Ecojustice](#) uses the power of the law to defend nature, combat climate change, and fight for a healthy environment. Its strategic, public interest lawsuits and advocacy lead to precedent-setting court decisions and law and policy that deliver lasting solutions to Canada’s most urgent environmental problems. As Canada’s largest environmental law charity, Ecojustice operates offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, and Halifax

[Environmental Defence](#) is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization that works with government, industry, and individuals to defend clean water, a safe climate, and healthy communities.

Breast Cancer Action Quebec is a feminist, environmental health organization whose mission is the prevention of breast cancer, with a particular focus on environmental factors linked to the disease. Working in collaboration with a wide range of groups, BCAQ educates on toxics and other health issues and works for a clean environment and communities that support the health of their members.

The David Suzuki Foundation (davidsuzuki.org) is a leading Canadian environmental non-profit organization, collaborating with all people in Canada, including government and business, to conserve the environment and find solutions that will create a sustainable Canada through evidence-based research, public engagement and policy work. The Foundation operates in English and French, with offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

The [Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment \(CAPE\)](#) is a physician-directed non-profit organization working to secure human health by protecting the planet. Since its founding in 1993, CAPE’s work has achieved substantial policy victories in collaboration with many partners in the environmental and health movements. From coast to coast to coast, the organization operates throughout the country with regional committees active in most provinces and all territories.

Équiterre offers concrete solutions to accelerate the transition towards a society in which individuals, organizations and governments make ecological choices that are both healthy and equitable.

Media contacts:

Sean O'Shea, communications specialist | Ecojustice
soshea@ecojustice.ca, 416-368-7533 ext. 523

Stephanie Kohls, Communications Director | Environmental Defence
media@environmentaldefence.ca, 416-885-7847

Brendan Glauser, Communications Director | David Suzuki Foundation
bglaiser@davidsuzuki.org | 604-356-8829

Viorica Lorcencova, Internal Coordinator, Breast Cancer Action Quebec,
viorica.lorcencova@acsqc.ca, 514-443-8437

Anthony Côté Leduc, media relations | Équiterre
acoteleduce@equiterre.org | 514-605-2000

Pamela Daoust, National Communications Director | Canadian Association of
Physicians for the Environment
pamela@cape.ca | 514-267-2589