CITIZENS SEEK SOLUTIONS TO ACID RAIN

CNF NEWS RELEASE

Over twenty citizen groups from Canada and the United States have joined forces to demand action in controlling acid rain which, according to a recent International Joint Commission report, could endanger nearly 50,000 Canadian lakes over the next 20 years. Shortly after taking office, John Fraser, Federal Environment Minister, said that acid rain is the most serious environmental problem Canada has ever faced.

John Fraser and other politicians will be pressed for answers when they appear at a citizen-run conference in Toronto later this year. Besides politicians, scientists, industry representatives, bureaucrats and members of the public will come together to learn the causes and effects of acid rain, to focus on the status of international negotiations and consider legal and technological solutions to the problem.

The conference, called ACTION SEMINAR ON ACID PRECIPITATION (ASAP) will be held in Toronto on Friday and Saturday, November 2 and 3, at the downtown Holiday Inn.

Acid precipitation (increased acidity of rain and snow) is an international problem. Tall smoke stacks in Canada and the United States spew millions of tons of sulfur and nitrogen oxides into the air (by-products of the burning of fossil fuels and smelting of certain ores) which combine with water droplets and fall as acid rain or snow many miles from the source.

According to Rick Pratt of the Canadian Nature Federation, one of the sponsoring organizations, the need for the conference is paramount because the action of governments, industry and the public at large will ultimately determine whether thousands of lakes in Canada and the United States continue to support abundant wildlife or go the way of certain lakes in the Adirondack mountains of New York and Haliburton-Muskoka area of Ontario which are no longer able to support many types of fish. "The situation is critical", he said. "Over the last decade, some lakes in Ontario have lost 40 to 75 percent of their ability to neutralize acid. Once buffering reserves are depleted, small amounts of acid cause large changes which in turn can cause lakes to become too acidic to support many forms of aquatic life."

Besides affecting the water and its inhabitants, acid rain can cause soils to lose fertility and directly damage sensitive plants. It may also release toxic heavy metals such as mercury, copper, lead, nickel, aluminum and zinc otherwise bound to soils and lake sediments.

Although no direct human health problems have yet been revealed, acidic water in metal plumbing may increase copper and lead concentrations in household water. Commercial fisheries may be ruined by increased toxic heavy metal concentrations in fish. Acid rain can also affect paint on automobiles and buildings.