I am myself and what is around me, and if I do not save it, it shall not save me.

Ortega y Gasset

Our environment is the "stuff" that surrounds us. It includes the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the soil where our children play. It is with us day and night, wherever we go, whatever we do. It is the most public of public health issues.

Any consideration of this issue must include an understanding of :

- **Air pollution**
- **Greenhouse effect**
- **Global warming**
- **Atmospheric pollution**
- **Water pollution**
- **Globalization**
- **Renewable energy**
- **Sustainable development**

Air pollution outdoors is as obvious as smog, car exhaust and smoke belching from factory smokestacks. What is less obvious is the air pollution in our homes. For example, many people develop allergies and asthma because of the harmful fumes given off from cleaning products, paints, carpets with odour, and cigarette smoke.

The worst air pollution comes from burning gasoline and other fossil fuels, in cars, buses, trucks, and factories. These emissions produce oxides of carbon, sulphur, and nitrogen which result in acid rain production and the build up of gases in the atmosphere which contribute to the greenhouse effect.

Greenhouse effect Certain gases in the earth's atmosphere act just like greenhouse glass: they keep heat from the sun in and make things under them hotter than they would be otherwise. These **greenhouse gasses** include water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone and a few others. The thicker the layers of gas the hotter the earth gets. This is the greenhouse effect.

Global warming is a condition caused by the greenhouse effect. Scientists are concerned that a tiny change in the overall average temperature of the earth will have an immense impact on life on our planet. Two of their greatest concerns centre on the possibility of permanent climate change and the melting of the polar ice caps. Climate change will upset all the natural rhythms of where and how we all live and work. Melting of the polar ice caps will lead to a global rise in sea levels and massive flooding, to the point of submerging entire land masses such as, Pacific islands and parts of Florida.

Atmospheric pollution weakens the protective capabilities of the ozone layer that circles the earth. The thinning of the ozone layer is a result of our massive use of various chemical agents in such things as refrigerators, hair, paint and other aerosol spays. The thinning of the ozone layer allows more ultraviolet-B radiation to reach the surface of the earth. Higher levels of UV-B radiation dramatically increase the risk of severe damage to all living things—including permanent genetic change. The immediate effects on human health include increased risk of eye diseases, skin cancer and immune system suppression.

Water pollution comes in two forms: water-borne diseases caused by poor sanitation (microbiological contamination); and genetic and health-damaging pollutants caused by man-made chemicals. The result is water unfit for human consumption without treatment, as well as for aquatic life, irrigation and industrial purposes.

Globalization of the world economy is now an undeniable environmental concern. Free trade agreements, such as the GATT and NAFTA, are essential to the process of globalization. Such agreements inevitably weaken the ability and will of national governments to control what big business can and cannot do in their country. Environmental standards and controls are always weakened in and often removed from such agreements.

Renewable energy The earth has vast reserves of renewable energy. These come in the form of wind, water, sun, and heat from the earth's molten core. While non-renewable energy (fossil fuels and nuclear power) has been in common use for only 200 years, humans have used renewable energy sources for thousands of years. Renewables have two major advantages over fossil fuels: their supply is essentially limitless, and their use and application has far less impact on our environment than non-renewable energy sources.

Sustainable development will mark a break with our past. It will be development that meets the needs of present generations, without compromising the needs of future generations. This is nothing like the kind of development we have known.

We built an economy based on assumptions of limitless water and other natural resources, along with limitless cheap energy. All our assumptions were wrong. Now we must find ways to avoid or undo the stark consequences of these mistakes. One logical step will be to restructure our economy on a different basis—namely, sustainability.

This means redesigning and remaking every aspect of how we live—from industrial processes, to transportation and buildings, to patterns of consumer supply and demand. The government must be enlisted to begin this process, in both the public and private sectors. The costs of this program will be recovered from the tremendous savings in energy costs, and efficiencies created through pollution abatement and other initiatives. One of it's main benefits will be hundreds of thousands of new jobs, from the most basic cleanup work in watersheds to engineering and communications.







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Union leadership Unions must take a place in the front lines of the fight for a natural environment fit to live in.

Unions must enthusiastically embrace sustainable development. We must, in particular, acknowledge:

- A sustainable community is a community that lives on, after a main business that employed its citizens has closed or moved.
- A sustainable economy is one which provides continuous employment.
- An unsustainable economy is one where we will ultimately have no jobs and no future for our children.
- Industrial pollution which poisons workers in the plant, also poisons our communities and degrades our environment, our amenities.

The drive for an environmentally friendly planet must ever and always combine concern for the impact human activity has on the natural environment with an equal concern for the impact necessary changes will have on working people. Such concerns will naturally include concepts such as:

- Just transition
- Green jobs

Just transition In efforts to have a more sustainable, environmentally friendly economy, workers are generally affected by the transition to becoming more sustainable. To protect workers displaced by environmental change, some unions are insisting on transition measures (just transition).

Green jobs There are two sorts of green jobs: jobs that provide goods and services that are friendly to the environment; and jobs that provide goods and services to turn conventional workplaces into centres that are environmentally friendly.

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