

# **Communications Plan on Acid Rain**

*Prepared by:*  
**The Committee on the Environment  
of the Conference of  
New England Governors and  
Eastern Canadian Premiers**

## **Communications and Outreach Plan on Acid Rain**

The present document outlines a communications plan to address issues pertaining to acid rain in the New England states and Eastern Canadian provinces. The communications plan is comprised of four sections. The first reviews the rationale for the plan, goals and objectives, key messages and target audiences. The second section includes results of information gathering efforts conducted by the Acid Rain Communications Work Group during 2000. The third section applies these results to create a program of communication efforts to be implemented over the next few years as resources allow. The fourth section discusses responsibility for implementation of the plan.

The plan suggests the periodic evaluation of communication/outreach efforts. This evaluation will ensure relevancy as well as accuracy in communicating technical information that substantiates the larger policy objectives outlined in the rationale below. The plan is designed to be cross-jurisdictional, but allows for tailoring to meet needs and priorities of each member jurisdiction.

### **SECTION I: Background/Key Messages**

#### **A. Rationale**

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Public outreach and education are key components of the New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers' Acid Rain Action Plan adopted in June 1998. The action plan stipulates that the public needs to know what the eleven jurisdictions have accomplished as a region in addressing the acid rain problem and what needs to be achieved to fulfill the overall goal of protecting the natural environment, especially the acid sensitive resources.

The intent of the 1998 Acid Rain Action Plan relating to public outreach and education is to revitalize and deliver programs in support of the commitment to reversing the serious acidification of vital aquatic and terrestrial resources by raising public awareness of:

- ?? the continued relevancy and critical nature of acid rain;
- ?? the results of scientific study of acid rain, its impacts on the environment, and the effectiveness of our respective national control programs;
- ?? the need for further scientific research, measurement, data analysis and reductions in the acid forming emissions from all sources contributing to the continued degradation of our compromised natural resources;
- ?? the need to consider a broad range of pollution issues when management recommendations are formulated; and
- ?? the relationship between acid rain issues and public health.

There are several reasons that lead states and provinces to develop an acid rain communications plan. States and provinces feel that:

1. Public awareness and concern over the effects of acid rain and associated regional transport problems has declined along with the perception that current control programs have resolved the problem.
2. States and provinces feel there is a need to educate the population as to why acid rain is a problem, its impacts on lakes and streams, on forest health and productivity, on air quality, and on human health.

## **B. Goals and Objectives**

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- ?? Revitalize and increase public awareness around the acid rain issue in an accurate and simple way.
- ?? Provide a public reporting structure (awareness) around the work of the NEG/ECP on the acid rain issue.
- ?? Advance action to reduce the cause of acid rain and its impacts on the jurisdictions within NEG/ECP.

## **C. Key Messages/Discussion Points and Target Audiences**

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Key messages are designed to provide concise “memorable” information to target audiences on acid rain issues. They are drafted with as few words as possible to answer the questions: *What is the problem? Why should I care about the problem? What is being done? and What can I do about the problem?* Key messages are in a sense “sound bites” and are most critical to work with the media, but should also be integrated into all information materials on acid rain issues. For key messages to be effective they must be repeated as often as possible in as many formats as possible.

The key messages and discussion points were finalized based on the results of the survey of the New England states and the Eastern Canadian provinces conducted in July and August 2000, discussed in the next section. The target audiences were finalized based on discussions with the acid rain work groups in September 2000 in Quebec City. (See more detailed account of these discussions below.)

Discussion points are included to provide more in-depth information for printed materials, presentations and for use when the opportunity arises during extended interviews.

Identifying the target audiences is a first step toward understanding who “needs to know” about the acid rain issues. Different audiences will be targeted over the course of the project dependent upon the information that is being communicated. Work groups and individual jurisdictions will determine who the targeted audience(s) should be when developing information materials.

### **Key Messages**

- ?? Acid rain is still a major international problem.
- ?? The emissions that cause acid rain contribute to serious health problems.
- ?? Burning fossil fuels causes acid rain that pollutes our air, land and water.
- ?? While most emissions that cause acid rain originate primarily from outside our region, we can't ignore local sources and responsibility.
- ?? The impacts of acid rain on our lakes, forests and public health are more serious now than ever before.

- ?? Eastern Canadian provinces and New England states are working together to address the acid rain problem.

### **Discussion Points**

- ?? Acid rain is causing significant damage to our forests and aquatic ecosystems.
- ?? There is increasing evidence linking acid rain-causing emissions to respiratory problems.
- ?? The air pollution emissions that cause acid rain travel from west to east through the atmosphere causing damage far from the source of those emissions.
- ?? The Eastern Region of the continent (New England states/Eastern Canadian provinces) acts like a “sink” collecting much of this pollution generated in the central areas of both Canada and the U.S. in the form of acid rain.
- ?? Eastern U.S. and Eastern Canada are making progress with reducing emissions, but can't control what is happening outside the NEG/ECP region. Joint action is necessary to legislate further controls.
- ?? Solving the acid rain problem is a shared responsibility that will require individual actions and government actions to legislate further controls.
- ?? Acid rain is linked to other regional environmental problems. Solutions to solve the acid rain problem will have beneficial effects on other regional problems such as mercury, smog, global warming, and haze and visibility, and all of their related public health concerns.

### **Suggested Target Audiences for all Jurisdictions**

*Publics (not in any special order)*

- ?? citizens - upwind and downwind
- ?? business and industry groups
- ?? select environmental/naturalist and recreation groups (of national significance, i.e., Ducks Unlimited)
- ?? education (schools)
- ?? forestry/timber industry
- ?? trade unions
- ?? health advocacy groups which are cross jurisdictional (i.e., lung associations)
- ?? media
- ?? Native Americans and Canadians/all First Nations' groups

*Governments (not in any special order)*

- ?? elected officials at the state/provincial/federal levels
- ?? specific ministers/committee chairs (environment, natural resources, health, industry)
- ?? key elected officials in upstream and downstream locations
- ?? major regulatory agencies at the national levels

### **Suggested Target Audiences for use Within Specific Jurisdictions**

*Publics (not in any special order)*

- ?? scientific/academics
- ?? local environment/naturalist/recreational organizations
- ?? health/medical/physician, pulmonary specialists - provincial/state organizations
- ?? health advocacy groups specific to local areas

*Governments (not in any special order)*

- ?? elected officials at the municipal level
- ?? other elected or appointed officials (i.e., Canadian senators)
- ?? provincial/state regulatory bodies
- ?? provincial/state interdepartmental considerations (natural resources, health, fisheries, industry, etc.)
- ?? local historic/cultural preservation agencies
- ?? local economic development agencies
- ?? jurisdictional tourism departments
- ?? eco-tourism groups (local)
- ?? local tribal or First Nations' representatives

## **SECTION II: Information Gathering**

During the past year, two efforts were conducted to help establish priorities for the acid rain awareness program. The first was a public opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2000 and the second included facilitated discussions with the acid rain work groups to understand the internal information needs and priorities.

### **A. Public Survey to Measure Public Awareness and Attitudes**

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With approval from the NEG/ECP Coordinating Committee and the Committee on the Environment, a public opinion survey was administered in the NEG/ECP region as well as select mid-western U.S. states and Ontario in the summer of 2000.

The survey was designed to measure public opinion and awareness of acid rain deposition, test key messages and provide a benchmark of public awareness to evaluate the effectiveness of communication efforts over the long term.

Specifically it aimed to:

- ?? understand and compare the importance of various quality of life issues including environmental issues;
- ?? compare concern for acid rain with other environmental issues;
- ?? evaluate awareness and understanding of causes and consequences of acid rain and mercury;
- ?? evaluate the likelihood people will make behavior changes related to the reduction of acid rain and mercury deposition;
- ?? obtain public reaction to various approaches to address acid rain deposition; and
- ?? identify the best media through which the target audiences can be reached.

A questionnaire was administered via 15-minute telephone interviews of 3,014 adults, 18 and older, living in Eastern Canada including Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and in New England - Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In Canada, Ontario was included. Outside of New England - New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois were also included. The survey was administered in English and French according to the respondent's region of residence and choice.

The major findings of the survey have led provincial and state departments of the environment to agree on the need to increase public awareness on the causes, and the impacts of acid rain on lakes, rivers, forest and human health. Provinces and states are committed to establishing a link between health issues and air quality with acid rain.

The following themes emerged from the survey results and have been incorporated into this communications plan:

1. Environmental Protection ranked 5<sup>th</sup> (80%) behind Health Care, Family Values, Human Rights and Low Crime Rates.
2. While water quality and air quality were identified as the top two environmental concerns (86% and 80% respectively), acid rain specifically was not top environmental concern (55%).
3. Seventy-five percent of respondents were extremely or very concerned about damage to lakes/rivers by acid rain and 73% were extremely or very concerned about contamination of the food chain by mercury or lead. Seventy-two percent were extremely or very concerned with deterioration of air quality due to acid rain impacts.
4. Nearly two-thirds of respondents identified industrial activity and exhaust emissions from cars and trucks as the main sources of acid rain (65% and 63%). Just more than half identified coal/oil burning as a source of acid rain (51%). However, more than half incorrectly attributed the use of pesticides as a source of acid rain (52%).
5. One out of three respondents perceive the region they live in as at very high (13%) or high (20%) risk from the effects of acid rain. Less than one in five (17%) think of the region they live in as a large source of acid rain. Forty-three percent of respondents in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois believe they are a small source (29%) or not a source at all (14%).
6. The majority of respondents believe imposing severe fines on heavy polluters (87%) and having stricter regulations on industry and power plant emissions (86%) are the top two ways to address the acid rain problem. Having stricter regulations on automobile emissions was the least popular approach (78%); however, the majority of respondents do agree with it.

7. Purchasing energy-efficient appliances and/or vehicles to solve the acid rain problem was preferred (73%) over lifestyle behavior changes such as reducing car trips (49%) and walking, riding bikes or using public transportation to get to work (31%).
8. The Internet is not the most effective tool for broad-based outreach. Television (60%) and newspapers (53%) are preferred sources of information. Radio (28%) and the Internet (24%) are preferred only by a minority of respondents.

Repeating the survey at various intervals (every 3 or 5 years) during the acid rain outreach projects should be considered to measure the effectiveness of outreach activities by tracking changes in attitudes and opinions as well as individual behavior.

## **B. Identify Information Needs, Work Efforts and Key Milestones for Acid Rain Work Groups**

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At the September 2000 meeting of all the acid rain work groups, facilitated discussions were held with each work group to discuss information needs, availability of technical information and priorities both short and long term.

The following is a brief summary of key communication issues and suggestions made by the work groups.

- ?? Assistance (from the Communications Work Group) identifying “who should know” and “how will we tell them” when project milestones are achieved by individual work groups (for example, developing newsletters or press releases targeted to specific audiences)
- ?? Identify stakeholder opportunities for information sharing for individual work groups (for example, set up a public meeting to reach out to interest groups)
- ?? Internal communications should be prioritized to include: 1) website for sharing information internally, 2) regular briefings on what is going on in various work groups, and 3) a directory with areas of expertise of the NEG/ECP region people
- ?? Assistance (from the Communications Work Group) with rewriting technical information to make it appropriate for a wide range of audiences
- ?? Develop template “thank you” letter from NEG/ECP to recognize individuals/organizations who shared information

## **Section III: Communication/Outreach Efforts**

This section outlines recommended communication and outreach tasks that states and provinces will focus on for the next few years. A number of these have been prioritized for this next year and are noted as such. The proposed efforts are in keeping with the goals and objectives laid out in Section I of this plan and reflect the results from the information gathering discussed in Section II.

While the Communications Work Group will lead the development of these materials and efforts, all work groups will be integrally involved to ensure accurate scientific information is communicated and that products reflect the needs of the work groups. The following tasks are oriented to external audiences except where noted.

*Please note, the tasks outlined here are subject to funding opportunities and/or possible partnerships with other agencies. In addition, many of the activities outlined below are for local jurisdictions to expedite. For example the :30 or :60 second radio public service announcements could be written through this plan and the media time (be it purchased or free) would be the responsibility of local jurisdictions. In addition, all materials will be developed in both French and English.*

### **A. Develop and Distribute School Curriculum (2000-2002)**

Master copies of curriculum materials that have been developed for the NEG/ECP by the State of Maine will be made available to each jurisdiction for distribution to their own network of schools/educators. The "Changing Earth Times" is an environmental studies news bulletin featuring activities for middle and high school students. It is a teaching tool to bring the latest science research into the classroom. The fall 2000 issue explores the issue of acid rain: What are the causes of acid rain? What will be the impacts on earth's ecosystems? Students can explore these questions through a role-playing activity, virtual research activities and a risk management activity. The decisions students make involve economic, social, political and environmental considerations. This content aligns with U.S. National Learning Standards for scientific inquiry, nutrient cycling and scientific communications skills. Copies of the acid rain newsletter in English are available on the Internet at: [www.janus.state.me.us/dep/air/outreach.htm](http://www.janus.state.me.us/dep/air/outreach.htm).



## **B. Create Website for Information Sharing and Data Exchange (internal website functional in 2001 - public website by 2002)**

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The NEG/ECP secretariats will proceed with the development of an extranet website for use by the Acid Rain Steering Committee and the acid rain work groups. The objectives of this internal website are as follows :

- ?? to increase the level of communications amongst the various work groups;
- ?? to provide a forum for work groups to post their documents and maps; and
- ?? to provide the opportunity for work groups to submit feedback on documents and discussion papers.

With the development of this internal website, work groups will be able to post their maps of the region with network sites and trends. These maps will allow for work groups to share information that can be used in the context of other acid rain initiatives.

Once the internal website is in operation, the attention will shift to the development of a public website. The public website will serve as a tool to raise public awareness, and to view and download public documents and maps as well as providing feedback to states and provinces on environmental issues.

## **C. Publish Information Materials to Establish Reporting Structure on Efforts of Work Groups**

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### **Progress Report (summer 2001)**

To begin with, a progress report will be developed to provide an account of the state of the environment as it relates to acid rain. It is intended primarily for key public officials, including the governors and premiers, as well as for the general public. The report will provide a synopsis of the initiatives undertaken by each acid rain work group. Each work group will submit information and provide direction on the story they wish to communicate pertaining to the specific tasks being carried out. A template for this report will be developed to reflect the graphic identity. Information or “stories to share” will be gathered from all the work groups and a final camera-ready file (one in English and one in French) will be provided to individual jurisdictions for printing. The report will be published on a semi-regular basis based on two criteria: 1) availability of resources for its production, and 2) a determined need to share new information. The progress report will include a graphic identity that can be used for all other public information materials relating to acid rain.

### **Brochures/Fact Sheets/Thank you letters (2001-2002)**

A variety of other informational materials on acid rain will be developed over time as well. These can include: brochures and fact sheets to inform the public that acid rain is still a major international problem. The materials will be made available in both electronic and print form. Topics for the brochures and fact sheets can include details on why the public should be concerned about acid rain, its causes, and solutions to curb the problem. The intent is to provide factual information on how citizens in New England and Eastern Canada (as well as outside the NEG/ECP region) contribute to the causes of acid rain and what actions they can undertake to stop acid rain.

A draft thank you letter will be made available to work group co-chairs to be shared and used to recognize people and agencies who have helped further the efforts of the work groups by sharing data, etc. The thank you letter could have the NEG/ECP secretariats' signatures.

### **Speaker's Kit (2001-2002)**

A speaker's kit, which can include a PowerPoint presentation with script and handouts (fact sheets, etc.), can be developed and shared with all jurisdictions for presentations to any variety of groups (depending upon targeted audience). The content will include the key messages and discussion points from this document with places for individual jurisdictions to localize information. It will serve as another tool to generate interest in acid rain and can be continually updated as more and more information is available to share.

### **Briefings (2001 and beyond)**

A template for briefings for individual work groups to use to report progress to other work groups as well as to the steering committee can be created by work groups. These will be simple in nature and could also be developed in conjunction with the internal website that is outlined in this plan as well.

## **D. Hold Public Forum to Establish Link with Health Issues (fall 2001)**

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The communications work group will organize a public meeting with special emphasis on acid rain and health related issues. The overall intent of the public meeting is to initiate discussions on acid rain and health, but the specific objectives are as follows:

- ?? raise public awareness on health as it relates to acid rain;
- ?? establish partnerships with non-governmental organizations and the medical community; and
- ?? foster involvement of the state and provincial health agencies.

## **E. Develop Newspaper and Radio Advertising Tools to Generate Awareness of "Acid Rain" Message (ads by summer 2001 with campaigns ongoing)**

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Provinces and states will work together to generate a set of print and radio advertisements that can be used in both a paid advertising format or as free public service announcements (PSAs). These advertisements can include graphics and copy for print ads as well as copy for :30 and :60 second radio spots. This effort will focus on communicating the acid rain key messages included in Section I of this report. Paid media placement will be dependent upon funding and most likely will be driven by jurisdictions. In addition, it may be useful at some point to run a campaign with these tools in the source states and provinces outside the region.

## **F. Market Transformation Campaigns (2003 and beyond)**

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To begin to tackle individual behavior change when it comes to reducing the precursors to acid rain, market transformation campaigns can be developed to help consumers make affordable choices that reduce emissions. Incentive based programs that partner with manufacturers and retailers can be established based on successful models in other regions. For instance, a program designed to reduce emissions from gas-powered lawn mowers has transformed the Western Washington State marketplace (and reduced emissions!) through partnerships with manufacturers and annual “tent sales” of electric rechargeable mulching lawn mowers.

## **G. Media Relations (ongoing)**

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Opportunities to talk to the media about acid rain should be generated, regularly based on a variety of events such as the release of scientific studies or activities that have an acid rain tie-in. An ongoing media campaign will be necessary to build and maintain a constituency on acid rain since raising awareness of the acid rain problem is a long-term process. Techniques can include press events around specific emissions reducing measures, or press releases announcing website availability (like the ozone mapping real time) and significant findings from work groups.

## **Section IV: Implementation**

Overall implementation of the communications plan will be the responsibility of the communications work group. The communications work group will serve as a catalyst in most cases for both work groups and individual jurisdictions. It is anticipated that the Acid Rain Steering Committee and the acid rain work groups will play a vital role in the implementation of the tasks outlined here by providing information and support.

It is understood that implementation of the communication/outreach initiatives will require the allocation of human and financial resources from states and provinces. To successfully implement the initiatives outlined in the plan, the establishment of partnerships with various groups will be essential.

Work groups’ projects and initiatives need to be communicated as part of the overall communication strategies deployed by states and provinces. The activities or projects undertaken by the acid rain work groups will help communicate the key messages outlined in this plan. It will be the responsibility of each project work group to inform the communication work group when a specific activity or project is ready for release. The communication group will then provide advice on strategies to communicate these activities and projects. This will also be a chance to determine the need for targeted stakeholder involvement for individual work groups.

Researching and developing partnerships with both government and non-government organizations is an important piece of the long-term success of the Acid Rain Communications Plan.

In the short term, with money from Massachusetts, an RFP will be issued to:

?? produce the graphic identity and slogan;

- ?? develop the progress report template; and
  - ?? create the graphics and copy for the print and radio ads.
- This work will be completed by June 2001.

Additional work will be developed as resources allow and will be prioritized by the Acid Rain Steering Committee in conjunction with the technical work group co-chairs.