



# The United Church of Canada General Council

## GC40 Continuing Air Quality Standards and Health (GC 40 2009 - 044)

True Document Date  
August 14, 2009

That the 40th General Council 2009 approve taking the actions requested in the following proposals, and direct the Executive of the General Council either: to take such actions; or where action is required by another body or officer, to oversee the implementation of such action.

- BC 1 - Bella Bella Emergency Lighting
- LON 10 - The Abolition of Nuclear Weapons
- ANW 14 - Protecting Canadian Children and Our Environment
- ANW 6 - Energy and Climate
- TOR 1 - Canada's Official Development Assistance
- **ANW 3 - Continuing Air Quality Standards and Health**
- M&O 16 - Return Omar Khadr to Canada

# **ANW 3 - Continuing Air Quality Standards and Health**

**Origin:** Alberta and Northwest Conference, Concurrence, May 24, 2009

Lamont Health Care Centre Advisory Committee, February 26, 2009

**That the General Secretary, General Council be directed to call on The United Church of Canada, through its various courts (General Council, Conference, Presbytery/District and local courts), to encourage our provincial, territorial and federal governments to make health the primary determinant for setting air quality standards in Canada, and that adequate resources be put in place to monitor and enforce these standards.**

## **Background**

**Framing the Question:** As we further develop as an industrialized nation we believe that the church should be fully committed to educating its members in a balanced and thoughtful way on the many aspects of the impact of pollution on our health and the well-being of all of creation. We would like the United Church of Canada to become more actively engaged in expressing its concern to all levels of government on the effects of pollution on the health of Canadians and by doing so speed the processes seeking satisfactory resolutions to this growing problem.

**Exploring the Question:** While our concern lies at all levels we are particularly aware of the potential pollution problems because of the immediate adjacency of the LHCC (Lamont Health Care Centre) to the Heartland Industrial Area in Alberta and its massive petrochemical development. In the immediate context we are concerned over the proposal by Alberta Sulphur Terminals Ltd to construct a sulphur forming and shipping facility just 6 km upwind of the LHCC. We have expressed our concerns by letter to the County of Lamont and by letter and presentation to the NRCC (Natural Resources and Conservation Board)

But air quality is not just a local or even a provincial matter. It is profoundly

important to every Canadian. Henry and Martha are now elderly and suffering from COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) after years of breathing air with pollutants above scientifically established levels that can harm people. Children and adults are developing asthma at astounding rates unseen even a decade ago.

“The genetic pool does not dramatically change over the decades,” notes Dr Michael Cyr (an allergist and immunologist at McMaster University Hospital, Hamilton, ON). “So it’s obvious there’s something else going on here.” And that something appears to be our environment. (Article – “Why so many allergies now?” by Gwen Smith and Dory Cerny. Page 24 Allergic Living Fall 2008)

A new study No Breathing Room: National Illness Costs of Air Pollution (August 2008) from the Canadian Medical Association says that in 2008 air pollution will kill 21,000 Canadians. It will also result in more than 620,000 visits to doctors’ offices.

The World Health Organization has set air quality standards in particular in regards to particulate matter, ozone, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide levels. These levels are based on the extensive scientific evidence on air pollution and its health consequences.

The report The Air We Breathe (David Suzuki Foundation) compares Canada’s voluntary air quality guidelines with the legally binding national standards in the United States, Europe and Australia, as well as recommendations by the World Health Organization. The report concludes with several key, workable solutions for reducing the toll of air pollution on the health and well-being of Canadians. “In a country that cherishes its health care system, we offer weaker protection from air pollution than the U.S., Australia, or the European Union,” says David Boyd, report author and Trudeau Scholar. “In order to provide an adequate level of health protection for Canadians, the federal government needs to establish and enforce legally binding national standards for air quality. By reducing pollution, we can save thousands of lives, prevent millions of cases of illnesses, and save billions of dollars in needless health care costs.”

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