

# **Report from the Acid Rain and Mercury Workshop of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers - February 11-12, 1998, Portland, Maine.**

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I spoke on a panel during the Acid Rain Workshop concerning regional solutions, and urged the officials gathered from the various New England States and Eastern Canadian provinces to draft a new action plan for their respective Governors and Premiers to endorse at their June meeting in Fredericton. Specifically, I urged them to build on the 1985 agreement they signed to reduce regional emissions, pressure the two federal governments for action, and adjust the regional targets as needed according to new scientific information.

Sadly the acid rain plan signed in Fredericton in June by the Governors and Premiers fell far short of this. It committed them to pressuring their respective federal governments for action to reduce emissions by another 50 percent beyond the current targets established under the Canada-U.S. Air Quality Agreement, but only committed to the idea of setting new regional targets at some point.

Canada and the United States are currently committed to reducing sulphur dioxide emissions by 50 percent from 1980 levels. This was achieved and exceeded in eastern Canada in 1994, but the Americans will not meet their target until 2010. The latest science says that to stop the damage caused by acid rain entirely, a further 75 percent reduction is required beyond this point. A further 50 percent reduction is expected to solve the problem in the Maritimes, but it will take a 75 percent cut to eliminate the problem in Quebec and Ontario. While the eastern Canadian provinces are expected to sign an agreement with Ottawa by the year 2000 to make further cuts of this magnitude, the Americans are way behind, particularly in the mid-western states where the concentration of big coal-fired power plants is responsible for considerable acid rain in the east. In fact, the New England states along with New York and Pennsylvania are suing the mid-west states for failing to pursue the reductions in sulphur dioxide emissions mandated under the U.S. Clean Air Act.

As a result, the New England Governors in no way want to commit to further cuts that might widen the gap further between what they have done and what the mid-western states have done in terms of cutting back emissions. Add to this the fact that acid rain is not on their political radar these days, and the scientific research that has been done here to determine what the critical loads of sulphate in what regions is entirely lacking in New England - the Governors were not going to support a new regional target.

On the up-side, the American environmentalists working on acid rain were quite pleased with the acid rain plan that was endorsed because they felt it would send a strong message to

Washington. All of this comes up for review within the next few years in both the U.S. Clean Air Act and the Canada-U.S. Air Quality Agreement.

The big news item from the Portland conference from my perspective was a presentation by Québec Natural Resource officials who revealed that their Department had reduced the annual allowable cut for black spruce in some areas of the province because of slower than expected tree growth attributed to acid rain damage. There seems to be a developing consensus in eastern Canada that the impacts on forest health that will help drive the second round of emission reductions - given the economic value of the forests in the region.

The other useful observation is that we continue to largely ignore the need to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides which also cause acid rain. The control efforts over the last 15 years have pretty much focused on sulphur emissions which primarily come from coal-fired power plants and smelters. Real efforts are going to have to be made to cut back nitrogen emissions, in which case transportation as a source plays a much bigger role.

The workshop was extremely useful for getting a read on where the Americans are on this issue, and for the opportunity to give a New Brunswick perspective to the gathered delegates. With the eastern Canadian acid rain control program expiring in a year and a half, in light of the upcoming review of the adequacy of the Canada-U.S. Air Quality Agreement, and given the not unrelated Kyoto commitments, acid rain-causing emissions are likely to be back on our provincial agenda shortly. Given this, and in light of the real ecological harm it is doing to our province, there is a real need for more environmental groups in New Brunswick to get up to speed on acid rain and become engaged.