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TAR SANDS and WATER DON'T MIX

THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS
LE CONSEIL DES CANADIENS

E-NEWSLETTER, MAY 2009

The Council of Canadians has been working in coalition with partners to convey a strong message to politicians studying the tar sands: Tar sands and water don't mix and we need federal government action now!

The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development is studying the impact of the tar sands on Canada's water resources. The committee held meetings earlier this month to hear from selected First Nations community leaders, scientists, environmental organizations, and industry representatives.

Northern Alberta's tar sands are home to an estimated 173 billion barrels of recoverable bitumen – a tar-like substance that requires intensive processing to become synthetic crude oil. There are serious social, environmental and economic consequences of tar sands development. The massive industrial project pits multinational energy corporation agendas against the health and environmental concerns of boreal forests being destroyed, watersheds being contaminated and vast tracts of land pillaged for the sake of corporate profits. Indigenous peoples' rights are being overlooked, incredible amounts of water are being wasted and contaminated to the point the water is no longer useable and people are getting sick from cancer-causing carcinogens. The real question about the tar sands energy boom is: Boom for whom?

The Council of Canadians continues to call for no new approvals of tar sands development projects. **Show your support »**

Go [here](#) to find other tar sands-related resources including **fact sheets**, **tar sands images** and to view our video ***Tar Sands: The Dark Side of the Boom***.

Here's more about what's new at the Council of Canadians:

- **Win! Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Legislation Delayed**
- **Help Save Sandy Pond and Other Canadian Lakes from Becoming Toxic Dumpsites**
- **People Rally and March to Protect Site 41**
- **Win! Liberals Back National Water Policy and Human Right to Water**
- **Join the Council of Canadians Today!**

Support our work – Donate now

The Council of Canadians is a non-profit organization and **does not accept money from corporations or governments**. Our work is sustained by the generous donations of concerned Canadians who share our vision and commitment to action. **Go here** to find out how you can join tens of thousands of like-minded people who believe that a better Canada – and a better world – is possible.

Sign up!

Want to stay up to date on Council of Canadians' news, activities and hard-hitting analysis? **Enter your e-mail address »**



Members of the Council of Canadians, community members, non-government organizations and First Nations leaders held a rally and press conference outside the *House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development's* hearings in Edmonton.

Win! Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Legislation Delayed

Your action on the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is working! Thanks to your letters, telephone calls, e-mails and meetings with MPs, Bill C-23, the implementation legislation for the FTA, has been pulled from the government order paper until the fall.

On Monday, the Liberals indicated they were reconsidering their support for the deal. This was the significant shift. Last month, Liberal trade critic Scott Brison said his party would not oppose the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement because “it’s easier to engage a country on human rights issues when you’re engaged on economic issues.” But this week, Brison called on the Harper government to conduct a formal independent Human Rights Impact Assessment before allowing the enabling legislation to proceed.

On April 30, more than 50 prominent individuals and organizations sent Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff a letter urging him to help stop the ratification of the proposed Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement until a full and independent human rights impact assessment could be carried out.

“We the undersigned are deeply concerned that Canada would abandon its values and its support of internationally recognized human rights in order to gain economic advantage for its companies at the expense of millions of displaced, impoverished Colombians,” said the letter, which was signed by Maude Barlow, Stephen Lewis, Ed Broadbent, Claudette Carbonneau, Alex Neve, Paul Moist, Rev. Bill Phipps, Farley Mowat, Sarah Polley, Naomi Klein, and others, as well as organizations like the Council of Canadians, Greenpeace, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, the B.C. Teachers’ Federation, Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, the National Union of Public and General Employees and many more.

Our Members of Parliament should be applauded for recognizing the problems with the Canada-Colombia free trade deal, but Bill C-23 – the bill to implement could never have been stalled without the support of unions, non-governmental organizations, and Council of Canadians activists.

The struggle is far from over. We have won four more months (the House resumes sitting on September 21) to mobilize opposition against this trade agreement, but it’s crucial that we keep the pressure on our MPs.

[Find the tools to do that, including draft letters and fact sheets on the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement »](#)

Help Save Sandy Pond and other Canadian Lakes from Becoming Toxic Dumpsites

The Council of Canadians has been helping to raise the alarm about a federal government loophole that allows mining companies to dump their toxic waste in Canadian Lakes.

We were in Newfoundland-Labrador recently promoting the Council’s **Blue Communities Project** which encourages communities to help protect public water. While there, we visited Sandy Pond, a lake located near Long Harbour in Newfoundland-Labrador. The federal government has given Vale Inco. – a nickel mining company – permission to dump mining waste from a new production plant into Sandy Pond, poisoning the water and destroying all aquatic life.



It is illegal under the Fisheries Act to dump toxic material into fish-bearing waters. But lakes in Canada are quietly being reclassified as toxic dumpsites for mining corporations through “Schedule 2,” a loophole added to the Fisheries Act’s regulation on mining waste to allow lakes and other freshwater bodies to be re-classified as “tailings impoundment areas,” thereby allowing mining companies to get around the general prohibition. This amounts to a massive subsidy to the mining industry at the expense of publicly owned fresh water resources; this to an industry that made a net profit of over \$80 billion in North America in 2007.

“We must immediately stop the practice of allowing mining companies to use Canadian lakes like Sandy Pond as dumping grounds for toxic mine wastes,” said Meera Karunanathan, National Water Campaigner for the Council of Canadians shortly after visiting the site. “Sandy Pond is just the tip of the iceberg – at least 16 mines in Canada are seeking permission to destroy healthy natural water bodies with their mine waste. Freshwater ecosystems are far more valuable in the long run than any mined resource and should be protected.”

Take Action! Tell Environment Minister Jim Prentice that Canadian lakes shouldn’t be used as dumpsites for toxic mining waste. Everyone has a stake in the future of our fresh water sources. We encourage you to make your voice heard.

[Send a letter today »](#)

Maude Barlow Leads Rally and March to Protect Site 41

Maude Barlow, national chairperson of the Council of Canadians and Senior Advisor on



Water Issues to the President of the UN General Assembly, joined with hundreds of concerned citizens earlier this month to oppose plans to build a garbage dump at the Sacred Surface Springs of the Alliston Aquifer, near Georgian Bay. We are pressing the Ontario government to overturn plans for the dump.



Known as "Dump Site 41" the landfill was narrowly approved by Simcoe County Council by 16-15 vote. The Alliston aquifer is located directly below Site 41. It is also the site of a number of shallow aquifers that provide safe water supplies for local residents and several communities in the area.

"Water, in my opinion, is the single most important environmental and human-rights threat of our time, and while millions around the world are dying and going thirsty, Simcoe County is about to violate this unique and precious Canadian aquifer."

[Read more about this issue and to see pictures from the recent rally »](#)

Win! Liberals Back National Water Policy and Human Right to Water

In response to intensive lobbying efforts by the Council of Canadians, delegates at the recent Liberal Party of Canada convention voted in favour of a resolution recognizing pressing water issues in Canada.

The resolution states that, "Canada establish a National Water Policy that would protect water from commoditization, and from international agreements that would undermine the authority of the Canadian government and citizens by introducing binding legislation to ban bulk water exports; and committing the federal government to enter talks with the U.S. and Mexico to exclude water from NAFTA and all future trade agreements; (and) enshrine water as a human right to ensure that all people living in Canada are legally entitled to safe, clean, drinking water and water for sanitation in sufficient quantities..."

The Council of Canadians worked hard before the convention to ensure members of the Liberal Party were aware of the importance of water issues to the country. Before the vote we sent an open letter signed by Council of Canadians chair Maude Barlow, David Brooks of Friends of the Earth Canada, water-expert David Schindler of the University of Alberta, Clayton Thomas-Mueller of the Indigenous Environmental Network, Tony Clarke of the Polaris Institute and others, calling on delegates to support the resolution. The resolution is expected to help form party policy and platform in the next federal election.

[Read our media release on this »](#)

Join the Council of Canadians today!

Founded in 1985 by a handful of citizens including Farley Mowat, Pierre Berton and Margaret Atwood, the Council of Canadians is Canada's pre-eminent public watchdog organization. By becoming a member of the Council of Canadians your generous support helps give our organization a voice on social, economic and political issues and build a strong, independent and diverse Canada. **Join the Council today**, and help us prove that a better Canada is possible. Already a member? Share this newsletter with a friend and encourage them to join or donate and become a part of Canada's largest citizens' advocacy organization.

Want to read about more of our wins?

The Council of Canadians – our members and chapter activists – are making a difference across the country. To read regular highlights of our achievements visit our new "Wins" section on our website at www.canadians.org.

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