

XII. IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS - THE ENVIRONMENT

A. Assessments of the Environment

A decline in assessments of the state and quality of the environment is evident this year after increases measured last year. While a majority (53%) continue to believe that the quality of the environment in their area is good or excellent, this represents the lowest level in the four years **The Quarterly** has examined Canadians' impressions of the environment. Quebec and Ontario residents remain most negative in their assessments.

Table 23

ASSESSMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

	% Response			
	<u>June 1986</u>	<u>June 1987</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Excellent	14	12	14	11
Good	48	44	47	42
Only Fair	30	33	29	36
Poor	8	11	10	12

Concomitant with the decline in assessments of the quality of the environment, Canadians are more inclined to believe that the quality of the environment in their area has deteriorated in the past year. Again, the smallest proportion (24%) in the past four years believe that the environment has improved while the highest proportion (36%) acknowledge that it has worsened.

Table 24

PERCEIVED CHANGE IN ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

	% Response			
	<u>June 1985</u>	<u>June 1986</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Significantly Better	7	4	6	4
Somewhat Better	23	23	23	20
About the Same	46	53	45	40
Somewhat Worse	18	17	20	29
Significantly Worse	6	3	4	7

Residents of Ontario and British Columbia are least likely to believe that there has been any significant improvement in the quality of the environment while residents of Quebec and New Brunswick are most likely to believe that there have been improvements.

Concern about the environment has decreased markedly since the record high measured in March of 1989 and has returned to levels recorded in June of last year. While not quite as intense as last June, fully 89% of respondents indicate that they are concerned about the environment with 48% of respondents indicating that they are "very concerned."

Table 25

CONCERN ABOUT QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENT

	% Response				
	<u>June 1987</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>Dec. 1988</u>	<u>Mar. 1989</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Very Concerned	38	50	48	57	48
Somewhat Concerned	48	39	36	34	41
Not Very Concerned	11	7	11	6	8
Not At All Concerned	3	3	5	3	3
No Opinion	0	1	0	0	0

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Among those respondents who indicate they are concerned about the quality of the environment, the highest proportion (36%) indicate they are most concerned about the quality of the environment in urban areas. These data indicate an increase in the concern about urban areas and a decrease in concern about rural areas since last examined in June of 1988.

Table 26

FOCUS OF CONCERN ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

	% Response	
	June <u>1988</u>	June <u>1989</u>
Wilderness Areas	21	20
Rural Areas	33	28
Urban Areas	32	36
All The Same (Vol)	13	15
No Opinion	1	0

B. Environmental Concerns and Health

Despite a sense that the quality of the environment has worsened somewhat over the past year, fewer Canadians believe that general environmental concerns affect their health to the same extent they did in the last quarter. There have, however, been considerable fluctuations over the past year with a high intensity one year ago, a decline in December, the highest in March of this year and a significant decline again in this most recent quarter. The following table summarizes these findings.

Table 27

EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS ON HEALTH

	% Response				
	<u>June 1986</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>Dec. 1988</u>	<u>March 1989</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Very Much	35	38	30	40	32
A Fair Amount	43	40	40	41	44
Not Very Much	19	19	23	17	19
Not At All	3	2	7	2	5
No Opinion	0	1	0	0	0

For the first time this quarter, specific environmental concerns have been examined in the context of implications for personal health. Respondents were asked whether or not a range of specific concerns represented an immediate and life-threatening risk, a serious but not life threatening risk, not much of a health risk or no health risk at all.

Those issues which emerge as posing a significant immediate life-threatening risk all centre on the use and disposal of chemicals. The top three environmental concerns identified as posing immediate, life-threatening risks include pollution of drinking water due to the disposal of industrial and chemical waste (47% say this is an immediate, life-threatening risk), the storage of dangerous chemicals (46%) and the destruction of the ozone layer due to the use of certain chemicals (43%).

It would appear that those environmental concerns which pose an involuntary risk are most likely to be identified as immediate and life-threatening health risks. Health risks related to water pollution, dangerous chemicals and destruction of the ozone are beyond the control of individuals. There is a chance that their health could be placed at risk as a consequence of exposure to these specific concerns. Overall, it would appear that there is an emotional overstatement attached to assessments of specific environmental concerns; however, this underscores the seriousness of environmental concerns for Canadians.

The following table summarizes these findings.

Table 28

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF RISK OF SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

<u>Environmental Concern</u>	<u>Immediate Life-Threat</u> %	<u>Serious, not Life-Threat</u> %	<u>Not Much of a Risk</u> %	<u>No Risk at All</u> %
Pollution of drinking water due to disposal of ind/chem waste	47	43	8	2
Storage of dangerous chemical substances	46	42	10	2
Destruction of ozone due to use of chemicals	43	49	6	1
Air pollution due to industrial emissions	38	53	7	2
Use of chemical pesticides on food	34	51	13	2
Transport of hazardous materials by rail/truck	34	44	18	4
Acid rain	30	56	12	1
Solid waste	25	60	13	2
Global warming	24	54	17	3
Damage to atmosphere due to auto emissions	22	63	13	2
Use of chemical pesticides on forest resources	22	54	20	4
Use of leaded gas	20	53	22	3
Chemicals used around the home	18	48	29	5

• Decima Research and Public Affairs International, 1989.

In terms of serious but not life-threatening risks to health, the largest majority identify damage to the earth's atmosphere due to auto emissions (63% identify this as a serious but not life-threatening risk), the increasing amount of solid waste or garbage due to the use of products which do not break down (60%), acid rain (56%), the use of chemical pesticides on forest resources (54%), global warming or the "greenhouse effect" (54%), and pollution of the air due to industrial emissions (53%).

A collapse of the data on immediate, life-threatening and serious but not life-threatening risks reveals that the concern about health risks held by the largest majority (92%) is the destruction of the ozone due to use of chemicals followed by pollution of air due to industrial emissions (91%) and pollution of drinking water due to disposal of industrial and chemical waste (90%).

Again, these data indicate that air and water quality dominate the public's environmental agenda but these concerns are directly linked to the use of chemicals. The destruction of the ozone layer (again, as a consequence of chemical use) also emerges as a significant concern.

C. Environmental Concerns and Lifestyle Changes

When asked whether or not they have made changes to the way in which they live as a result of concerns about the environment, this quarter's results reveal an upward trend in the number of Canadians who claim to have made lifestyle changes over the last two years. While those who claim they have made major changes is up somewhat, those who claim to have made minor changes has increased from 46% in June of 1988 to 49% in June of this year.

Table 29

LIFESTYLE CHANGES DUE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

	% Response		
	<u>June 1987</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Major Changes	16	20	22
Minor Changes	42	46	49
No Real Changes	42	34	29

In order to determine the types of changes people may have made, respondents were asked if they had undertaken a number of specific measures to alleviate their environmental concerns. As the following table indicates, there have been notable behavioural changes in Canadians' involvement in environmental protection practices since last examined in June of 1987. The most significant change occurs in the purchase of products made of recycled material with 63% of respondents now indicating that they buy such products compared to 48% in 1987. A significant change has also occurred in the use of aerosol cans with more than two-thirds (69%) of respondents now indicating that they stopped using such products compared to 58% in 1987. In addition, in all areas tested with the exception of purchasing certain packaged goods because of chemical additives, more Canadians are indicating that they have made lifestyle changes as a result of environmental concerns.

Table 30

**PARTICIPATION IN SPECIFIC LIFESTYLE
CHANGES ARISING FROM ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

	% Yes	
	<u>June 1987</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Sort cans, bottles, paper for recycling	53	56
Buy bottled drinking water	18	21
Stopped using aerosol cans	58	69
Buy products made of recycled material	48	63
Stopped buying certain packaged goods because of chemical additives	67	66
Stopped buying some fresh foods because of chemical additives	34	37
Started buying more unleaded gas	NA	77
Stopped buying products from companies who pollute the environment	38	41
Started buying products which are "environmentally friendly"	NA	73

These data indicate that Canadians are changing their behaviour in response to environmental concerns. Interestingly, significant majorities claim to have started using more unleaded gas (77%) and to have started purchasing "environmentally friendly" products (73%). It would appear that the advertising focus on these two issues in recent months is having considerable impact with the public (ie. advertising run by oil and gas companies and grocery chains).

In line with changes in behaviour in some specific areas, respondents are prepared to take a hard line when their reactions to other, more strict options are probed. For the first time, **The Decima Quarterly** has examined the public's receptivity to stiff measures meant to curb environmental damage. While respondents are reluctant to give up air conditioning as a means of alleviating environmental damage (54% support), substantial majorities claim to be prepared to accept an enforced refusal to collect unsorted garbage (84%), a banning of products made of plastic or foam (76% support), and the imposition of severe restrictions in the use of automobiles in heavily populated urban areas (66%). The table below summarizes these findings.

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Table 31

RECEPTIVITY TO STRICT ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

	% Response			
	<u>Strongly Support</u>	<u>Support</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Strongly Oppose</u>
Refuse to collect unsorted garbage	26	58	13	2
Banning of products made of plastic/foam	23	53	20	3
Restriction of auto use in populated areas	16	51	27	4
Banning of all air conditioners	12	42	37	7

There has been an increase in claimed environmental activism since last June.

Table 32

REPORTED LEVEL OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

	% Response		
	<u>March 1987</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Very Active	7	8	9
Somewhat Active	23	30	34
Not Very Active	29	34	32
Not Active At All	41	28	25

• Decima Research and Public Affairs International, 1989.

D. Responsibility for Environmental Protection

The federal government again emerges as having the primary responsibility for environmental protection. This quarter's results show a significant increase over last year in the identification of the federal government as the body with primary responsibility for environmental protection and a significant decrease in identification of the provincial governments. Perceived provincial government responsibility has declined to its lowest level in three years while federal government responsibility has almost returned to its high in June of 1986. Interestingly, a large proportion of respondents continue to identify individuals as those with primary responsibility. In fact, in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick and PEI the highest proportion of respondents identify individuals as having primary responsibility. In no province is the provincial government identified as having primary responsibility.

Table 33

PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

	% Response		
	<u>June 1986</u>	<u>June 1988</u>	<u>June 1989</u>
Federal Government	38	30	34
Provincial Governments	20	24	17
Private Industry	21	16	16
Individuals	18	27	29

While this issue was not probed in June of 1987, attitudes toward the funding of an environmental super-fund were tested. These data indicated that the highest proportion of respondents (32%) identified the private sector as the body which should be primarily responsible for providing the money for such a fund. It would appear that the federal government is perceived as the body which should enforce environmental controls while the private sector is perceived as the body which should pay for clean-up of damage already perpetrated.

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