

6. Environment

Our goal is a healthy environment, with diverse and vibrant ecosystems. A healthy society needs a healthy economy that does not damage the environment. We can achieve this only when we commit to the following principles:

- protect and restore nature and conserve our natural resources, and
- minimize the pollution we dump into the air, land and water.

These principles of protecting and restoring nature, and preventing pollution must become part of our approach to the social and economic well being of the province. Without a healthy environment, we cannot hope to achieve other important goals for Ontario, such as:

- eliminate the environmental causes of illness;
- secure healthy, safe and sustainable sources of food and water;
- create an efficient economy based on the conservation and sustainable use of all natural resources and the development of renewable and recyclable resources;
- create healthy and resource-efficient communities, where the local environment contributes to the quality of life, and
- promote public involvement in democracy and community development.

Ontario is a rich province with an able and diverse population and enviable resources. It should have no difficulty ensuring the basic requirements for a healthy and rewarding life. It can offer plenty of opportunities for all its residents. Increasingly, however, the ecological and social foundations of Ontario are being strained. There is no more graphic example of this than the tragedy of Walkerton. Economic shortsightedness, combined with inattention to environmental quality and social justice, undermines our health, security and long-term economy. This is unnecessary and unforgivable. In recent years in Ontario, we have seen:

- dramatic reductions in, or the elimination of, environmental programs and major staff reductions by governments;
- downloading responsibilities to lower levels of government without the necessary transfer of resources;
- privatization, or proposed privatization, of public lands and services such as water, transit, garbage and electricity;

- growing reliance on voluntary action by industry to protect the environment, and
- increasing pressure to reduce the role of government and eliminate programs and regulations aimed at protecting and enhancing the well-being of people and their communities.

When moving toward more environmentally and socially sustainable livelihoods, workers and their communities must not bear a disproportionate cost of the transition.

Recommendations for A People's Charter:

- **Just transition to a green economy.**
 - *We must practice the principles of “Just Transition” and allow workers and communities the right to choose both economic security and a healthy environment. This is a benefit to all, and a necessary condition for long-term job security. In the long run, environmental protection and rehabilitation produce more and safer jobs.*
- **Protect the diversity of ecosystems and species.**
 - *Ontario must develop strategies to ensure the long-term health of species and ecosystems. This should include the active and full involvement of a wide range of people and their organizations. To be an inclusive and successful process it is critical that the opportunities are created for many perspectives to be heard and to be involved. Key actions include:*
 - *Developing a network of protected areas reflecting the diversity of Ontario's ecosystems and species. Such areas should be of sufficient size and integrity to allow natural processes to continue.*
 - *Addressing the economic and social concerns of workers, their communities and aboriginal people all of whom depend on the health of existing ecosystems.*
 - *Prohibiting the intentional introduction of non-native species, including products of biotechnology. Exceptions should only be permitted where it can be proven there will be no negative effect on biological diversity.*

- **Guarantee clean air and water.**
 - *Ontario needs to eliminate the major sources of contamination of our air and water, and set emission and treatment standards at levels based on the requirements for human health. In particular, Ontario should:*
 - *set air emission standards at levels protective of human health;*
 - *adopt a Safe Drinking Water Act, as drafted by the Canadian Environmental Law Association;*
 - *restore staffing levels and funding for the Ministry of Environment to pre-1995 levels;*
 - *preserve and enhance the role of the public sector in providing environmental regulation and services;*
 - *reject for-profit water utilities;*
 - *revitalize the Ontario Clean Water Agency, and*
 - *prevent the export of bulk water.*

- **Eliminate toxins.**
 - *revise standards for pesticides, as well as air and water pollutants to ensure that persistent toxins are targeted for virtual elimination from the environment and for zero discharge;*
 - *ban the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes;*
 - *reduce household hazardous wastes and improve the standards for disposal, and*
 - *develop a comprehensive provincial policy for the clean-up of contaminated lands.*

- **Promote energy conservation and green sources of energy.**
 - *Energy conservation and renewable energy are important ways to minimize our environmental impact, build an efficient and competitive economy, and develop energy security for the province. Ontario can become a leader in energy conservation and green energy if it will:*
 - *adopt a Public Benefits Charge on electricity bills to fund programs to retrofit existing buildings to make them more energy efficient, to promote renewable energy research and development, and to subsidize low-income customers;*

- *promote energy efficiency in new buildings and plants by adopting R2000 and C2000 standards, improving energy efficiency standards for appliances, and offering tax incentives for efficient energy consumption;*
 - *adopt a standard requiring utilities to increase use of renewable energy sources from about 0.5 percent today to 10 percent by 2010 and 20 percent by 2020, and*
 - *commit to preserving and enhancing the leading role of the public sector in electricity generation and distribution.*
- **Create compact, healthy communities and stop urban sprawl.**
 - *Urban sprawl is one of the greatest environmental problems we face. It eats up valuable farmland and green space, increases air pollution and energy consumption, and results in poorly planned communities.*
 - *Ontario must act now to:*
 - *protect prime farmland and significant ecological systems such as wetlands or moraines;*
 - *revise the Planning Act to promote ecosystem-based planning, urban intensification and land use planning rules that support public transit;*
 - *shift tax and regulatory incentives from green field to brown field development, and*
 - *provide adequate funding for public transit by linking it to gasoline taxes.*
- **Promote an environmentally responsible, sustainable economy.**
 - *Extended Producer Responsibility must be at the core of waste management policies.*
 - *Ban the disposal of refillable, reusable, repairable, recyclable and compostable items from landfill sites.*
 - *Ensure that all workers have the right to refuse to pollute. Resources must be made available for workers and their organizations to develop training material to make them aware of this right and how it can best be used.*
 - *Involve workers and their communities in the development of “Just Transition” Programs when and where they are needed.*

- **Strengthen democracy.**
 - *Promote public involvement in government processes and access to information.*
 - *Involve workers and their communities in developing and implementing community economic development strategies.*
 - *Support public participation in discussions and decisions related to the NAFTA, WTO, FTAA, and other agreements furthering an increasingly global economic system.*