

Statement of Environmental Values

Ministry of Health

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ontario *Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR)* was proclaimed in February 1994. The founding principles of the *EBR* are stated in its Preamble:

- *The people of Ontario recognize the inherent value of the natural environment.*
- *The people of Ontario have a right to a healthful environment.*
- *The people of Ontario have as a common goal the protection, conservation and restoration of the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations.*

While the government has the primary responsibility for achieving this goal, Ontarians should have the means to ensure that it is achieved in an effective, timely, open and fair manner.

The purposes of the Act are:

- To protect, conserve and where reasonable, restore the integrity of the environment;
- To provide sustainability of the environment by the means provided in the Act; and
- To protect the right to a healthful environment by the means provided in the Act.

These purposes include the following:

- The prevention, reduction and elimination of the use, generation and release of pollutants that are an unreasonable threat to the integrity of the environment.
- The protection and conservation of biological, ecological and genetic diversity.
- The protection and conservation of natural resources, including plant life, animal life and ecological systems.
- The encouragement of the wise management of our natural resources, including plant life, animal life and ecological systems.
- The identification, protection and conservation of ecologically sensitive areas or processes.

To assist in fulfilling these purposes, the Act provides:

- the means by which Ontarians may participate in the making of environmentally significant decisions by the Government of Ontario;
- increased accountability of the Government of Ontario for its environmental decision-making;

- increased access to the courts by residents of Ontario for the protection of the environment; and
- enhanced protection for employees who take action in respect of environmental harm.

The *EBR* requires a Statement of Environmental Values (SEV) from all prescribed ministries. The prescribed ministries are listed at <https://ero.ontario.ca/page/glossary#section-15>.

SEVs are a means for prescribed government ministries to record their commitment to the environment and be accountable for ensuring consideration of the environment in their decisions. A SEV explains:

- how the purposes of the *EBR* will be applied when decisions that might significantly affect the environment are made in the ministry; and
- how consideration of the purposes of the *EBR* will be integrated with other considerations, including social, economic and scientific considerations, that are part of decision-making in the ministry.

It is each Minister's responsibility to take every reasonable step to ensure that the SEV is considered whenever decisions that might significantly affect the environment are made in the ministry.

The ministry will examine the SEV every five-year interval to ensure the statements are current.

2. MINISTRY VISION, MANDATE AND BUSINESS

The Ministry of Health is working to establish a patient-focused, results-driven, integrated and sustainable publicly funded health system. Its plan for building a sustainable public health care system in Ontario is based on helping people stay healthy, delivering good care when people need it, and protecting the health system for future generations.

The Ministry of Health is committed to:

- Providing faster access to care by enhancing access to primary care providers, reducing unnecessary emergency room visits, and bringing down wait times.
- Delivering better coordinated care in the community and closer to home by improving access and options for palliative care, mental health and addictions services.
- Educating patients to make the right decisions about their health through Ontario.ca/Health and better relationships with health care partners.
- Sustaining the health care system by making quality decisions such as reducing prescription opioid misuse, increasing low-risk birth options and protecting patients from sexual abuse.

The Ministry of Health is committed to providing excellent customer service, and is guided by the principles of accessibility, responsiveness, reliability, caring, and accountability.

More details on the responsibilities of the Ministry of Health can be found on the ministry website <http://www.health.gov.on.ca>.

3. APPLICATION OF THE SEV

The Ministry of Health is committed to applying the purposes of the EBR when decisions that might significantly affect the environment and the health of Ontarians need to be made in the ministry, and as it develops Acts, regulations and policies.

The ministry works to protect the public from health hazards posed by environmental contaminants by promoting a healthy physical environment, and by promoting and monitoring the environmental health of the population.

Environmental Health, the protection and promotion of people's health, is a specific responsibility of the ministry's Ontario Public Health Standards carried out by the local boards of health. The goal is to prevent or reduce adverse health outcomes resulting from exposure to health hazards "(a) a condition of premises; (b) a substance, thing, plant or animal other than man, (or); (c) a solid, liquid, gas or combination of any of them, that has or that is likely to have an adverse effect on the health of any person" as defined in the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, and including biological, physical and chemical agents, natural or manmade.

The ministry's decisions will seek to provide leadership, local and regional planning, open, collaborative processes, good research and information, attention to special needs, efficiency incentives, and sound human resource management in meeting the health goals for Ontario. One of these goals is to ensure high-quality care and a safe work environment.

The ministry recognizes that this SEV applies only to the Ministry of Health itself, and nothing in the SEV affects in any way the legal or fiscal responsibility of hospitals and other health care partners to practice environmentally responsible behavior similar to that set out in this SEV.

4. INTEGRATION WITH OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Ministry of Health will integrate the purposes of the EBR with social, economic and other considerations when making decisions that might significantly affect the environment. The ministry will endeavour to ensure that environmental values are integrated into strategic planning, priority setting and policy development activities.

The ministry plays a major role both in preserving our physical and social environment and in protecting Ontarians from existing and potential health hazards posed by environmental contaminants.

A safe physical environment is the best assurance of environmental health. Environmental contaminants and other hazards do exist, however, and the ministry has the responsibility to help ensure appropriate and practical measures are taken to protect the public from their effects.

In reviewing policies for a significant effect on the environment, the ministry will consider all proposals specifically in the light of section 2(2) 1-5 of the Act. In addition, the ministry will consider:

- The extent and nature of the measures that might be required to reduce or prevent any harm to the environment that could result from the decision.
- The geographic extent (local, regional or provincial) of any harm to the environment that could result from the decision.
- The nature of the private and public interests, including government interests, involved in the decision.
- Any other matter that the minister considers relevant.

The Ministry of Health will encourage energy conservation in those sectors where it provides policy direction or programs.

5. MONITORING USE OF THE SEV

The Ministry of Health is committed to applying its SEV when making policy decisions that might significantly affect the environment and the health of Ontarians. Proposals will be reviewed at the initial stage to ensure they do not have a negative impact on the environment and that they support the ministry's SEV. The ministry will document how the SEV was considered each time a decision is posted on the Environmental Registry.

The ministry will provide communication, advice and training to ministry staff in the implementation and application of the purposes of the Environmental Bill of Rights.

6. CONSULTATION

The Ministry of Health believes that public consultation is vital to sound environmental decision-making. The ministry will provide opportunities for an open and consultative process when making decisions that might significantly affect the environment.

The influence of the environment on health issues will require the ministry's involvement with other ministries and jurisdictions whether working with inter-ministerial advisory groups or as the lead ministry. The ministry will contribute to

a collaborative process to recognize the need for society to become a conserver of diminishing non-renewable natural resources and to reverse trends and practices whose final disposition has been harmful to the natural environment.

7. CONSIDERATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The Ministry of Health recognizes the value that Indigenous people place on the environment. When making decisions that might significantly affect the environment, the ministry will provide opportunities for involvement of Indigenous people whose interests may be affected by such decisions, so that Indigenous interests can be appropriately considered. This commitment is not intended to alter or detract from any constitutional obligation the province may have to consult with Indigenous people.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE

The Ministry of Health believes that the public interest requires a broad effort to reduce greenhouse gases and to build a cleaner and more resilient province. The ministry will continue to involve and engage individuals, businesses, communities, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and First Nation and Metis communities in the goal of fostering a high-productivity low-carbon economy and society in Ontario.

The ministry will continue to mainstream climate change adaptation into healthy management policy, planning, programs and practices. The ministry will also work with partner ministries such as the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks to consider climate change mitigation as part of the government decision making process.

9. GREENING OF INTERNAL OPERATIONS AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

The Ministry of Health believes in the wise use and conservation of natural resources. The ministry will support the Government of Ontario initiatives to conserve energy and water in its own operations and to wisely use our air and land resources in order to generate environmental, health and economic benefits for present and future generations.

The ministry will continue to encourage energy conservation and resource conservation in its own operations by, for example, ensuring that office lights are turned off when possible and office equipment is turned off when not in use, and explicitly considering the environmental performance of the various options when equipment leases or purchase decisions are made. The ministry will also continue to educate and encourage staff on the 3Rs – reduction, reuse and recycling – to divert materials from disposal.