



ENVIRONMENT

RNAO's Policy Platform Backgrounder January 2013

Nurses know environmental determinants of health play a huge role in each community's overall health and well-being, as evidenced in Ontario^{1 2 3 4} and around the world.^{5 6 7 8} Environmental degradation and climate change are not vague future threats, but actual realities that are impacting Ontarians' health. Access to clean air, a safe environment, and reliable and sustainable forms of electricity help preserve our planet and secure the future for our children. That's why RNAO continues to focus on strengthening two key environmental determinants of health: supporting the use of green energy and reducing all exposure to toxics, including from the environment, in homes, in workplaces and in consumer products.

Green energy - RNAO strongly supports an electricity system that is safe, reliable, equitable and environmentally sustainable; one that supports community-sustaining green jobs, and one that does not pollute the air or leave a legacy of toxic waste and bankrupt Ontario residents and businesses.⁹ Healthy public policy demands aggressive conservation and energy efficiency targets as well as phasing out Ontario's dependence on dirty coal and other fossil fuels. RNAO's vision of a clean, healthy energy future is balanced and comprehensive. It includes:

- Closing immediately all remaining coal plants, keeping them on emergency stand-by until permanent closure in 2014 and only operating them if there is no other option to keep the lights on;
- Reducing consumption through conservation and energy efficiency;
- Cancelling plans for construction of new risky and expensive nuclear power plants;
- Strategic use of natural gas to meet peak needs until renewable power is online while ensuring all new natural gas-supplied electricity is not from shale gas extraction ("fracking") and uses highly efficient combined heat and power (CHP); and
- Solid targets and implementation plans for increasing reliance on renewable energy such as community-controlled, appropriately located and scaled water, wind, solar and bio-energy; subject to comprehensive environmental assessments.

Toxics - New toxics are being discovered and released on a regular basis, and the public is often unaware of their presence or effects. Concern has been growing about a worrisome class of toxics called endocrine disruptors. These particular toxics can cause serious health effects, even in very low concentrations and particularly in young children.^{10 11 12} The range of effects are not fully understood, but based on what is known, RNAO calls for extreme caution and tougher protection from the government on toxics by:

- Protecting the public's right-to-know about toxics in their environment, homes, workplaces and consumer products, and taking concrete action on issues such as product labelling.
- Committing to aggressive targets for reductions in the use, creation and release of toxics.
- Requiring mandatory substitution of safer alternatives for toxic substances in production processes.
- Establishing an independent academic institute to build capacity for meeting above requirements.

Recommendations:

1. Closing immediately all coal plants.
2. Ensuring people have the right-to-know about the existence of toxics in the environment, in their homes, in their workplaces, and in consumer products.

Questions for candidates:

1. Will you support immediate standby for all coal plants, leaving them on stand-by until their permanent closure in 2014?
2. What will you do to ensure the right of all Ontarians to know what toxics exist in the environment, in homes, workplaces, and in consumer products?

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