

Environment Canada cuts threaten science, international agreements

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Recent cuts to the scientific workforce of Environment Canada, a government agency responsible for meteorological services and environmental research, threaten scientific research related to the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere and pollution in the lower atmosphere, according to environmental scientists in the U.S. These reductions in personnel and projected budget cuts also threaten existing international agreements.

"Canada is a bellwether for environmental change, not only for Arctic ozone depletion but for pollutants that stream to North America from other continents, " said Anne Thompson, professor of meteorology, Penn State. "It is unthinkable that data collection is beginning to shut down in this vast country, in some cases at stations that started decades ago."

The researchers, commenting in the current (Feb. 14) issue of the American Geophysical Unions *Eos newspaper*, state that since August when the cuts went into effect, ozone soundings have ceased at several Canadian stations. Lidar network measurements of [particle pollution](#) layers from five Canadian stations no longer occur, and the website that was distributing this data has disappeared.

Environment Canada conducts many programs in support of international agreements including the UN framework for Climate Change Convention, the Montreal Protocol and U.S. bilateral agreements. The Canadian government signed all these agreements, but their ability to fulfil their obligations is now in question.

"Research conducted by scientists in Canada has been instrumental for the success of the Montreal Protocol, the international legislation that has successfully reduced atmospheric levels of ozone depleting substances," said Ross Salawitch, professor in the atmospheric and [oceanic science](#) department, University of Maryland, College Park. "The [ozone layer](#), particularly in the Arctic, is still sensitive because of the long atmospheric lifetime of pollutants that cause ozone depletion."

Binational agreements between Canada and the U.S. are also of concern to scientists and policy makers.

"A number of research areas in which Canada has shown past leadership now face a questionable future," said Ray Hoff, professor of physics, University of Maryland, Baltimore County. "These include deposition of toxic organic chemicals from the air onto the Great Lakes and vertical profiling of aerosols using laser radar."

Franco Einaudi, retired, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, adds, "Recent comments by Canada at the Durban Climate Change Summit have added to the concern that Canada's environmental commitment may be changing."

With Canada's vast Northern Territory, tracking climatic sensitivities as well as ozone depletion and arctic pollution are concerns of scientists and policymakers alike. Environment Canada's programs have long been a gold standard. With personnel losses and further decisions on reductions in force or re-assignment of personnel pending, the researchers are concerned that they and the international community can no longer rely on the exceptional efforts and past leadership that Canada exhibited.

"Canada stands to lose an entire community of highly respected scientists who are experts on [ozone](#) and climate if further proposed budget cuts go through," said Jennifer Logan, senior research fellow in

atmospheric chemistry, Harvard University.

Future [budget cuts](#) at Environment Canada appear certain. Until the community is given specifics about the long-term environmental program, the ability for Canada to maintain its key role in support of science and the international agreements like the Montreal Protocol is compromised. The world stands to lose an enormous amount of data necessary for our understanding of the environment in these cold reaches and around the globe if these programs end.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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