

# CLIMATE CHANGE: Report Gives Canada a 'C' for Environmental Efforts



In many ways, Canada sees itself as progressive when it comes to environmental issues. But is Canada really an environmental leader or are its environmental sustainability efforts lacking when compared to similar countries? A [new report](#) from The Conference Board of Canada looks at the indicators of environmental sustainability for 17 countries, including Canada, using the most recent data available. It gave the country a 'C' grade overall and ranked it 15 out of 17. See the chart at the bottom of this post for rankings. Here's a look at the highlights of this report, including what Canada's doing wrong and what it's doing right.

## 6 KEY AREAS EXAMINED

For each country, the report looked at 14 indicators to assess environmental performance in six key areas:

**Waste.** In 2009, Canada generated 777 kg of municipal waste per capita. In comparison, the 17 country average was 578 kg. Most of this waste goes to landfills or incinerators of the 34 million tonnes

[box] **Canada's Performance on Individual Indicators**

Compared with the 17-country average, Canada's performance is **above average** on five indicators:

generated in 2008, 26 million went there for disposal.

**Energy.** Canada's energy use is a mixed picture. Canadian GHG emissions [per capita](#) in 2010 earned a 'D' grade, likely because of increased exports of natural resources. But GHG emissions per capita fell by almost 5% between 1990 and 2010. Similarly, although Canada ranks last for the highest level of total energy consumption, energy intensity decreased by almost 20% between 1990 and 2009. And Canada improved the share of its electricity from nuclear and renewable sources (mostly hydroelectric power) from 72% in 2000 to almost 78% in 2011.

**Air quality.** Canada's performance on all four air quality indicators in the report's analysis improved between 1990 and 2009. However, compared to most other countries, Canada still emits higher levels per capita of nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which come primarily from vehicle emissions and chemical manufacturing.

**Water.** Overall, Canada enjoys abundant and safe water. For example, Canada got an 'A' for water quality and ranks 4th on this indicator. But when you look closer, regions such as the Prairies, southern Ontario and southern Quebec have water quality concerns, due in part to municipal water discharges—one of the largest sources of pollution in Canadian waters. In addition, Canada's water withdrawals are

- Use of forest resources;
- Low-emitting electricity production;
- Water Quality Index;
- Threatened species; and
- Particulate matter concentration.

But its performance is **below average** on nine indicators:

- Forest cover change;
- Nitrogen oxides emissions;
- Sulphur oxides emissions;
- Marine Trophic Index;
- GHG emissions;
- Water withdrawals;
- Volatile

nearly double the average of the other 16 countries. For example, Canadians use more than *nine times* the amount of water per capita than residents of Denmark do.

**Forest management.** Finally some good news'Canada is a top performer in its forestry practices. The country got an 'A' and ranks second only to Japan on use of forest resources. It also earned a 'B' for its change in forest cover between 2005 and 2010.

organic compound (VOC) emissions;  
▪ Municipal waste generation; and  
▪ Energy intensity.

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**Biodiversity.** Although Canada got an 'A' for the proportion of threatened species as a share of all species, the number of species at risk in the country is increasing, although federal biodiversity action plans have been prepared for the agriculture and forestry sectors. In contrast, Canada's Marine Trophic Index declined between 2000 and 2006, giving it a 'D' and ranking it last for this indicator. The Marine Trophic Index is a measure of the extent to which a country is fishing for smaller species that are further down the food chain, so it measures the overall level of depletion of fish stocks.

## **BOTTOM LINE**

A 15th place overall ranking'the same as it got in 2009'puts Canada ahead of only Australia and the US. These countries are similar: They're the three largest countries in terms of land area and the most resource-intensive economies in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The report notes that Canada's success in improving its environmental performance has been mixed. It has improved air

quality, reduced its energy intensity and increased the growth of forest resources relative to forest harvest. But it must do more to lower GHG emissions, use its freshwater resources more wisely and reduce waste. To improve its overall performance, the report recommends that Canada promote economic growth without further degrading the environment, partly by encouraging more sustainable consumption.

**INSIDER SOURCE**

[How Canada Performs'Environment](#), The Conference Board of Canada, Jan. 17, 2013

<b>Report Card: Environment</b>		
<b>RANK</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
<b>1</b>	France	<b>A</b>
<b>2</b>	Norway	<b>A</b>
<b>3</b>	Sweden	<b>A</b>
<b>4</b>	U.K.	<b>A</b>
<b>5</b>	Ireland	<b>A</b>
<b>6</b>	Switzerland	<b>A</b>
<b>7</b>	Japan	<b>A</b>
<b>8</b>	Italy	<b>A</b>
<b>9</b>	Austria	<b>A</b>
<b>10</b>	Denmark	<b>A</b>
<b>11</b>	Germany	<b>B</b>
<b>12</b>	Finland	<b>B</b>
<b>13</b>	Belgium	<b>B</b>
<b>14</b>	Netherlands	<b>B</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>16</b>	U.S.	<b>D</b>

17	Australia	D
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