

At this month's Lunch and Learn Series, ESANS was pleased to host Environment Canada's Stephanie Keast to speak about the Environmental Protection Operations Directorate (EPOD). Stephanie's presentation was on three regulations: products containing mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and hazardous waste movement. Each of these regulations have been continuously revised since their introduction to reflect the progress that Environment Canada has made with regard to the regulated substances.

The newest iteration of the Products Containing Mercury Regulation was released on November 19, 2014, just a few weeks prior to the Lunch n' Learn. This Regulation comes into full force in November 2015, at which time the manufacture and import of products containing mercury will be strictly prohibited. In doing so, Environment Canada hopes to improve upon its already formidable track-record of reducing mercury releases: there has been a 90% reduction in the annual release of mercury to the environment since the 1970s. Now, only about 2 tonnes of the total 7 tonnes of mercury that are released each year are a result of mercury containing products (defined as any product that contains mercury or a mercury containing compound). However, in certain instances mercury cannot be eliminated from important pieces of equipment, such as those used in dentistry and scientific instruments (precise thermometers). As such, under the new regulations the user must conclusively show that there is no alternative to using mercury for their application, and after approval the product must be clearly labeled as containing mercury.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls, or PCBs, have been regulated since 1977, when the use, importation, and manufacture of PCBs began to be regulated by Environment Canada. Since then, the storage of PCBs also became regulated in 1988, and the latest revision of the regulation came about in 2008. However, new amendments have recently been added to the Regulation, with the objective of virtual elimination of PCBs by 2025. These amendments will come into effect on January 1, 2015. The regulation applies to owners and persons using PCBs in essentially any way, shape, or form. PCBs are regulated based on their concentration: > 500 ppm were regulated out of existence already, 500-50 ppm must be destroyed by 2025, and < 50 ppm. Also, lamp ballasts and transformers with any concentration of PCBs must also be destroyed by 2025. As PCBs release furans and dioxins (known carcinogens) when they are burned, the storage of PCBs is heavily regulated, with maintenance plans and fire protection both mandated. Also, there are labeling requirements, reporting requirements, record retention and record keeping times associated with the storage of PCBs. Environment Canada uses an online reporting system, so reports are all submitted electronically.

Environment Canada has three regulations that comprise the framework for the regulation of the movement of Hazardous Waste: export and import, interprovincial movement, and PCB waste export regulations. The import and export of hazardous waste requires a permit issued exclusively by Environment Canada. Instances where hazardous waste could be imported include the import of PCBs from the United States in order for them to be destroyed at a Canadian PCB destruction facility. For the interprovincial movement of hazardous waste, Environment Canada must also give prior informed consent to the parties involved in moving the hazardous waste. Finally, regarding the export of PCB waste, the United States have closed their borders to PCB imports, so these regulations are not as relevant as they have been in the past. Moving forward, Environment Canada is proposing regulations that would replace, update, and consolidate these three existing regulations. Electronic waste is quickly becoming one of the most important sources of environmental damage, and these new regulations will focus more heavily on this fact.

ESANS would once again like to thank Stephanie Keast for taking the time to present and discuss the Environmental Protection Operations Directorate with us. We would also like to thank CBCL for hosting the Lunch n' Learn series in the conference room of their Hollis St. office. If you have any questions regarding Environment Canada's Environmental Protection Operations Directorate, you can reach Stephanie at Stephanie.keast@ec.gc.ca or by phone at 902-426-1631.