

The cover features a vibrant blue sky with wispy white clouds and a field of tall green grass at the bottom. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

# **TOXIC FREE CANADA**

ANNUAL REPORT 2008

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from the Executive Director 3

Launching a new name 4

A new voice in the news 5

Community right to know 6,7

Preventing cancer 8

Winning right to know 9

Workshops and more 10

Financial statements 11



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# from the Executive Director



It was a transformative year for us in 2008 as Toxic Free Canada grew from its roots in the Labour Environmental Alliance Society. We have a new name, a new logo, a French edition of our CancerSmart Consumer Guide, a new revenue model and an augmented staff. We've successfully reached out to new audiences while continuing to work with our traditional partners and allies, thus widening the circle for change.

We gained a national branch in Ontario by adding leading occupational cancer researchers Dr. Jim Brophy and Dr. Margaret Keith to our directors' team. We are proud that Jim and Margaret were honoured for their environmental work by a gold medal at the 2008 Canadian Environmental Awards.

Toxic Free Canada also helped ignited a spark of change across the country. From our website and the pages of the CancerSmart Consumer Guide, we have campaigned for new regulations to protect Canadians from such toxic chemicals as bisphenol-A. That change came in 2008, as Canada became the first country to declare the chemical toxic and to ban its use in baby bottles. More than ever, people are asking what chemicals to avoid and what is safe for themselves, their children and the environment. Toxic Free Canada has been there, advocating for community right to know and supporting consumers and decision makers with practical solutions and science-based educational material. More than 100,000 Canadians visited our websites in 2008.

We've set some challenging goals for the future. We want to show how toxics reduction can enhance the global campaign to curb climate change. We want to help communities win laws that can protect their environment and their children's health. We're optimistic that we can achieve those goals, especially having seen the changes that have come this year.

Our success and stability was only possible because of the support of our friends and partners, and the generosity of our many donors. Thank you for helping us towards our ultimate goal — a Toxic Free Canada.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Mae Burrows". The signature is written in a cursive style.

MAE BURROWS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Launching a new name

**The staff and directors rolled out a new name and a broader national vision this year as Toxic Free Canada became the new voice of the Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS).**



Symbolized by a new logo showing a child reaching for a maple leaf, Toxic Free Canada conveys more clearly LEAS' mission and work over most of the last 10 years.

In fact, the mission statement — to create alliances and initiatives that promote healthy workplaces, healthy homes and communities and a healthy environment — will be carried by Toxic Free Canada as it launches the second decade since LEAS was founded in 1998.

The new name became official at a launch event in Vancouver hosted by Vancouver furniture manufacturer and retailer Len Laycock in the furniture showroom of his company, Upholstery Arts. A pioneer in creating green furniture using non-toxic materials and environmentally-certified woods and fabrics, Laycock has also used his newspaper ads to promote Toxic Free Canada.

The launch featured renowned children's entertainer Raffi Cavoukian who has welcomed Toxic Free Canada's work to create a healthier environment as a complement to his own work in honouring children.

Across the country, Toxic Free Canada research coordinator Sean Griffin launched the new name at an event in Ottawa, hosted by a long time coalition partner, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, at its new headquarters, which is a showcase for green design and operation.

Within just months of the launch in April the new name realized some of the promise of greater recognition. Still, it wasn't a decision taken lightly or carried out quickly. Hundreds of supporters were surveyed for ideas and staff and directors spent weeks considering whether the new name truly represented the organization, its work and its direction. In the end, the new name set the new goal — a toxic free Canada for future generations.

**Children's entertainer and keynote speaker Raffi Cavoukian (r), with green entrepreneur Len Laycock at Toxic Free Canada's launch event in Vancouver, held in Laycock's Upholstery Arts furniture showroom.**



# A new voice in the news

As opinion polls have shown, more Canadians want to know about toxic substances that could affect their health or the environment. As the media turned its attention in that direction Toxic Free Canada was often in the spotlight.

In April, Canada led the way in becoming the first country to declare the chemical bisphenol-A toxic, prompting a flurry of reports in the media. Our research and educational work on BPA in consumer products made Toxic Free Canada the go-to organization for many reporters.

Executive director Mae Burrows and research coordinator Sean Griffin were quoted in stories in the Globe, CBC, CTV Newsnet and numerous regional media urging that the federal government take additional measures to protect Canadians from the potential effects of BPA. Even the marketing journal Marketing Edge brought Toxic Free Canada into their special feature Reigning Alternatives on the decline in polycarbonate water bottle orders prompted by BPA health concerns.

## RIGHT TO KNOW IN THE HEADLINES

Toxic Free Canada's strong advocacy of right to know legislation to provide hazard labelling on consumer products also resonated with Canadians and drew more media attention.

In May, the Vancouver Sun ran Burrows' op-ed on the issue as well as a full-page feature in their Living Green section that showcased Toxic Free Canada's leading work for legislative change. Over the summer, the Burnaby News Leader even put the issue — and Burrows' photo — on the cover, highlighting coverage that extended to several other regional media outlets. Some even offered editorial support for right to know legislation, demonstrating that the issue is gaining wide support in the media as well as among consumers.

Toxic Free Canada staffers have also been regulars on the talk show circuit, including CBC Almanac and Talk 1410's Nik and Mark show, on topics ranging from BPA to environmental disease.



# Community right to know

Years of mining activity and hydroelectric development have created an unknown toxic legacy for the Seton Lake Indian Band on their traditional lands near Lillooet in British Columbia. Their community's right to know was at the heart of our project work with the Band.

Two years ago, in 2006, leaders from the Seton Lake Indian Band approached Toxic Free Canada, seeking our help in determining whether their apparent high rates of cancer, respiratory ailments and miscarriages could be linked to toxins in their environment.

So began an exciting collaboration that led us into new areas of research and raised important questions about a community's right to know what toxic substances may be in the air, water or soil as a result of past industrial activity. In the project's first year, we worked with the Western Canada Wilderness Committee to conduct environmental mapping in the area and to work with community members in surveying community health. In 2008, we completed a second year of project work

with the Seton Lake Band and researchers from Thompson Rivers University.



Seton Lake Band councillor Rod Louie with a pink cross erected by the band to commemorate those lost to cancer.

In the area around Seton Lake, hydro and railway lines dominate the environment. There is a major hydropower transformer in Seton Lake and there is concern about the health effects of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) created by the transmission lines. In addition, herbicides have been used for decades along the rail and hydro rights of way and band members and their children have been exposed to the pesticide drift from the spraying. Many areas adjoining the lines are traditional berry-picking sites.

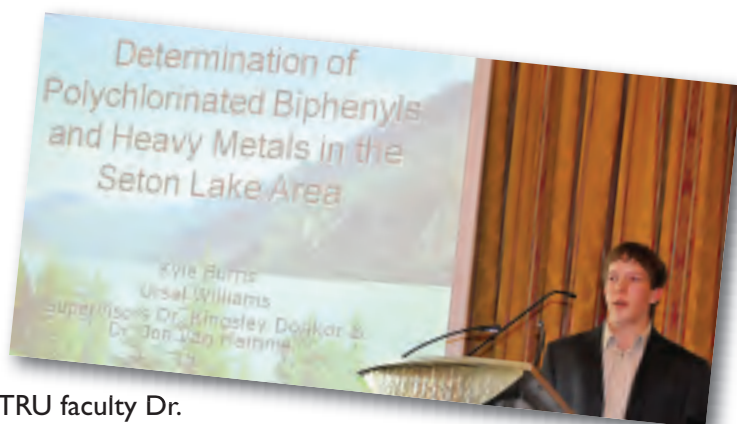
At the beginning of the year, Toxic Free Canada engaged scientists from Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops to undertake soil and sediment testing around both Seton Lake and Shalath, another Seton Lake community. They were

Seton Lake Band coordinator William Alexander (l) and Toxic Free Canada communications coordinator Claudia Ferris (second from r) with Thompson Rivers University researchers Ursal Williams and Kyle Burns.



looking particularly at polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), persistent carcinogenic chemicals associated with older electrical transformers, as well as arsenic, which was widely used in gold mining operations in the area. TRU students Kyle Burns and Ursal Williams were supervised by TRU faculty Dr.

Kingsley Donkor and Dr. Jon Van Hamme. Sediment samples were collected from 14 various sites in the area and analyzed at TRU.



**Thompson Rivers University researcher Kyle Burns reviews the results of soil testing that was carried out by the research team in the Seton Lake community.**

### **FOLLOWING UP WITH MORE RESEARCH**

While testing showed that levels of PCBs and arsenic were mainly within Health Canada's current safe exposure level, some test sites showed greater contamination. Researchers concluded that further work in deeper soils, along with water sampling and animal tissue testing, should be undertaken.

The pesticide research carried out by Toxic Free Canada indicated that some of the active ingredients in pesticides used along rail and hydro lines contained carcinogens, reproductive toxins, endocrine-disrupting chemicals and neurotoxins. Although the Seton Lake Band has maintained a ban on pesticide use in their territory since 1987, some of the pesticides used in the past are persistent and still linger in the local environment.

As a result, the Seton Lake Indian Band plans to follow up by undertaking further testing of wildlife, soil and possibly of worms in the soil to determine if members may still be exposed to these persistent toxins through their food. Researchers recommended that food sources be tested to detect hexachlorobenzene, PCBs, dioxins, diuron, mercury (organic and inorganic). They also recommended testing to detect any possible synergistic effects among these chemicals, especially as they might show up in wildlife.

This project would not have been possible without the collaborative work of our partners and the generous support of our funders, which included the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Health Canada's First Nations Environmental Contaminants Program, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, and Western Mining Action Network.

# Preventing cancer

In the last decade the idea that environmental factors play a significant role in the rising rates of cancer has moved into the mainstream. Toxic Free Canada's educational work on cancer prevention helped bring about that shift, especially the popular **CancerSmart Consumer Guide**, which continued to lead the way in 2008.



In April, Toxic Free Canada and its Quebec partner Option Consommateurs launched the French edition of the Guide at a packed news conference in Montreal. Entitled **Diminuez les risques de cancer : guide du consommateur averti**, the Guide was made possible with funding assistance from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

It quickly caught the attention of broadcast and print journalists across the province. Within two months, 3,500 copies had been sold and by the end of the year, more than 10 times that number of the combined editions had been sold across the country.

A newly-updated version of the English edition also came off the press in May, as Canadians continued to look for ways to reduce their exposure to potentially cancer-causing chemicals in their consumer products.

A new CancerSmart: Quebec consumers snapped up the new French edition as it came off the press in April.

## CURBING THE PESTICIDE THREAT

Across B.C. Toxic Free Canada continued to work with the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Association of Physicians or the Environment to encourage cancer prevention through the elimination of cosmetic pesticides. In October, 2008, hundreds of municipal politicians listened, as the Union of B.C. Municipalities overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution urging the province to follow the lead of Ontario and Quebec and pass legislation banning the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides. The focus will now move to the legislature.

Toxic Free Canada executive director Mae Burrows joined the Canadian Cancer Society's Kathryn Seely (l) and Lisa Weber (r) and David Waldron from the David Suzuki Foundation in promoting pesticide action at the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention.



# Winning right to know

## **If a consumer product you were using contained a carcinogenic ingredient, shouldn't you have the right to know?**

Thousands of consumers across Canada have answered that provocative questions with a resounding yes, creating a strong wave of support for Toxic Free Canada's campaign for right-to-know hazard labelling for consumer products.

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted in February for the Canadian Cancer Society showed that 97 per cent of British Columbians would support mandatory hazard labelling on products to identify any potentially cancer-causing ingredients. The poll showed even higher support for labelling than a similar poll conducted for Toxic Free Canada the previous year.

On Mother's Day, Mae spoke out as a mother in underlining the need for consumer product hazard labelling, joining Vancouver MLA Gregor Robertson at the podium. Robertson, who later stepped down to run successfully for Vancouver mayor, announced that he was re-introducing his private member's labelling bill into the British Columbia legislature.



We were also in Ottawa at the end of May, along with our Quebec partner Option Consommateurs, to urge all-party support for labelling legislation as New Westminster MP Peter Julian introduced his private member's Toxic Substances Labelling Bill into the House of Commons. Burrows also delivered hundreds of letters supporting right to know labelling, gathered from supporters across the country.

Although neither bill was passed, the issue, which Toxic Free Canada has pioneered, continues to gather support, as other organizations, including the Canadian Cancer Society, begin to make product hazard labelling a policy priority.

The wide support was demonstrated in a special consultation in Toronto on labelling sponsored by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. Burrows and Toxic Free Canada research coordinator Sean Griffin were among representatives of organizations from across the country taking part in the one-day event, which mapped out some future steps to move the right to know labelling campaign forward.

**Options Consommateurs executive director Michel Arnold and Toxic Free Canada executive director Mae Burrows talk to reporters at the National Press Gallery in Ottawa May 29.**

# Workshops and more

**In an age of e-mail and digital downloads, the use of the Internet can be a powerful tool to getting information to thousands of people and generating support. But hands-on workshops and forums have long been a tradition for Toxic Free Canada, and we continued that important work in 2008. It helps us to link directly with a diverse audience and amplifies our message through our connection with other organizations and groups.**

Our work on reducing toxic chemical exposure in the workplace saw us present several workshops in March for the United Food and Commercial Workers regional safety conference. We mounted a workshop for B.C. Hydro employees, created a new one-day course on Chemical Hazards in the Workplace for the B.C. Federation of Labour Occupational Health and Safety Centre and worked with the Sustainability Purchasing Network in presenting a workshop on green procurement.

Our outreach in the community saw us working with numerous groups in raising awareness about toxic exposures and helping consumers to switch to safer products. Among them were the B.C. Council of Parent Advisory Committees, the Health Action Network, the Sto:lo Nation and the SUCCESS multicultural agency. That work paid immediate educational dividends and laid the foundation for collaborative projects we expect to undertake in 2009.

On the research front, we began work in 2008 with the Capacity Building Project on the Chemical Management Plan initiated by the Canadian Environmental Network. Toxic Free Canada is part of an advisory committee of environmental and health groups across the country that will be reviewing the 200 “Challenge” chemicals identified for high priority screening by Health and Environment Canada and making submissions to government on how toxic chemicals should be managed.

**SUCCESS language coordinator Meena Wong translates information about ingredients in personal care products as Toxic Free Canada executive director Mae Burrows presents a workshop on toxins in household products sponsored by the multicultural agency.**



# Financial statements

## REVENUE

Foundations	\$253,169.89
WorkSafeBC	\$3,379.50
Donations	\$74,727.56
Workshop, consulting fees	\$21,571.85
CancerSmart Guide sales	\$66,010.09
Interest, rebates	\$210.85
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$419,069.74</b>

## EXPENSES

Wages, benefits	\$243,220.00
Media, training, special projects	\$6,483.80
Membership and donor development	\$51,645.83
Website maintenance	\$6,800.00
Publications, printing	\$4,680.50
Meetings, forums, workshops	\$5,602.88
Office, rent, services, supplies	\$69,826.89
Insurance	\$4,755.65
CancerSmart publishing, marketing	\$46,767.44
Travel	\$13,548.56
Accounting services, audit	\$6,409.29
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$459,740.24</b>
Deferred income	(\$40,670.50)

We gratefully acknowledge the financial and organizational support received from the following foundations, organizations, agencies and unions:

Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Endswell/Tides Canada, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, United Way, WorkSafeBC, InspireHealth, Western Canada Wilderness Committee, B.C. Federation of Labour Health and Safety Centre, B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, B.C. Nurses Union, B.C. Teachers' Federation, Burnaby Firefighters, Canadian Auto Workers, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, Federation of Post Secondary Educators, Public Service Alliance of Canada, United Food and Commercial Workers, United Steelworkers.

Our thanks to the many individual supporters who made donations to support the work of Toxic Free Canada in 2008. A very special thank you to our major donor Chris Fleck.



**toxic free!**  
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