



Backgrounder: Citizens' Environment Watch

Citizens' Environment Watch (CEW) was founded in 1996 by a group of concerned scientists, including Dr. Ursula Franklin, one of Canada's pre-eminent scientists and educators. It grew in response to the provincial government's drastic cuts to environmental staff and inspectors, and became an effective grassroots vehicle for engaging Ontarians in science, local ecological monitoring, and stewardship.

Since 1997, CEW has grown from a student-run project at the University of Toronto that hosted two water quality monitoring events per year to the leading non-profit organization offering education and training, equipment and support to community volunteers to help them design and implement local environmental monitoring programs. It has worked with over 4000 volunteers, (including over 60 % youth), and led over 100 environmental monitoring sessions in 10 watersheds across Ontario.

In May 2005, Citizens' Environment Watch was presented with an Environmental Award of Excellence at the first annual Green Toronto Awards by the City of Toronto. This honour is bestowed to organizations in the Greater Toronto Area that have displayed an active concern for the well-being of the city's greenspace.

CEW has made science, ecology, and data collection accessible in concept and practice to community volunteers through training sessions, community-based sampling protocols, and field guides that teach volunteers to monitor a variety of environmental indicators. CEW has helped citizens find opportunities to use credible community-collected data to participate in informed community decision-making in Hamilton (remediation of Red Hill Creek), Glanbrook (restoration of Binbrook Reservoir), Collingwood (sewage treatment improvement in Collingwood Harbour), North York (restoring Black Creek, introducing Brown Trout and Atlantic Salmon), and Pickering (curbing urban sprawl in Duffins Creek and Rouge watersheds).

CEW's ability to engage youth was recognized recently when participants in the 'Planet in Focus' film festival's Youth Camera Action program filmed a documentary about CEW and youth-directed water quality monitoring. In 2004, CEW recognized the achievements of its young participants through the first CEW Youth Leadership award (\$500 value), granted to students in St. Thomas, Ontario.

In recent years CEW has begun responding to community requests to monitor specific indicators. For example, in 2004 they partnered with Environmental Defence Canada, a national charitable organization, to identify appropriate protocols for community members to monitor water quality near hog farms using E. coli, nitrogen and phosphorus as indicators. As a pilot, a partnership was formed with TRCA to develop and deliver training to community groups.

CEW has acted as a catalyst, hosting a bi-national conference in 2000 to recognize the role of volunteers in the collection of monitoring data, and to discuss partnerships, funding opportunities and new directions in the field of community environmental monitoring. In 2004, with Watershed Report Card and Centre for Sustainable Watersheds, CEW brought together stakeholders at a workshop to address the need for an integrated approach to monitoring the state of the ecosystem in Ontario.

CEW's important efforts have been recognised in 2000 by the Ontario Science Centre, which featured CEW's water monitoring program at the Ontario Science Centre's millennium exhibition, Timescapes. CEW staff is in high demand to speak and present at various events, including Environment Canada's Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network National Science Meeting, the Science Teachers' Association of Ontario Annual Conference, the Ontario Society for Environmental Education Annual Conference, the A.D. Latornell Symposium and the Ontario Clearinghouse Conference.