

OFFICIAL OPENING OF CONFERENCE

Delegates, welcome to the 2001 Mining Diesel Emissions Conference.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) is proud to be part of this important international conference. Natural Resources Canada is a knowledge-based federal department with focus on the natural resource sectors. In keeping with this role, the department and its employees strive to be on the leading edge of research with the involvement of our partners, namely industry, universities and other government departments. NRCan's commitment to the Mining Diesel Emissions Conference (MDEC) and the Diesel Emissions Evaluation Program (DEEP) is tangible evidence of this co-operative approach to research. Both MDEC and DEEP are wonderful examples of tri-partite collaboration efforts, aimed at improving workplace health and safety in the mining industry. Here we have labour, regulators, mine operators, engine and control systems manufacturer and research institutions working shoulder-to-shoulder in diesel emissions-reduction research and development.

NRCan policy focuses on all three elements of sustainable development, namely, ensuring the economic benefits from our natural resources, protecting the environment for future generations, and providing benefits to society, including health and safety of the public. This conference, contributes directly and constructively to all three aspects of sustainable development, but more specifically, deals directly with the quality of life of Canadian workers and hence the social impact.

The introduction of diesel engines to underground mining has been directly responsible for huge increases in productivity, but there are now legitimate concerns for the health of workers exposed to diesel emissions over extended periods of time.

I am particularly proud of how proactive we have been with regard to protecting workers who use diesel engines in mining. If we look back 20 to 30 years, this proactive approach in dealing with the diesel emissions was alive and well in Canada and in the U.S. Some of the results of this foresight include the development of a practical method for measuring the exposure of miners to diesel particulate matter (DPM) and its implementation into several provincial regulations. This occurred even before our colleagues in the ACGIH (American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists) had made this change. Another outcome is the development and implementation of a Canadian diesel engine certification program for engines destined for use under ground. This certification process, unlike others, included diesel particulate matter in the calculation of the required dilution air volume. This again was also quite visionary and led the way to other standards in North America to include this parameter. Again, these efforts were done in a collaborative spirit, involving operators, labour and government. NRCan and CANMET often acted as the catalyst and were always deeply involved.

There are several noteworthy features of this MDEC conference. Firstly, the talent of the speakers and the diversity of the delegates are remarkable. It indicates a strong level of support from all mining stakeholders.

Secondly, for the past several years, MDEC has been the platform of choice for transferring the technology and knowledge from the DEEP research initiative. DEEP is now nearing the end of its mandate, and we are optimistic that the methods and technologies that have been developed and tested within this program will result in tangible improvements to the workplace environment. Aspects of sampling, analysis and control of DPM in the short to medium term may turn out to be key to the health of workers and to the sustainable operation of mines in Canada. I look forward to the DEEP project reports and updates in the first session.

Finally, until an alternative technology to diesel is found and widely implemented in mines, I hope that MDEC will remain active in order to advance and promote diesel emission control techniques and technologies. Accordingly, I would like to wish you an outstanding conference and continued success in this important work.

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