



April 22, 2009

An open letter from CNA President Kaaren Neufeld

Dear Colleagues:

As Canadians and citizens around the world pause to think about the environment today, I am writing to underscore the increasingly important roles that registered nurses can play and are playing in preventing and reducing environmental hazards that harm our health or the environment.

Earth Day began in 1970 as a relatively small event intended to raise awareness of environmental issues. Today, more than 170 nations and a billion citizens around the world participate in Earth Day events each year. Earth Day has become a symbol of the world's shift to environmental consciousness. I am pleased to say that the shift is being felt in the nursing community as well.

More and more, nurses are realizing they have a role to play in addressing environmental health issues. Nurses have the assessment and communications skills and the scientific background to identify environmental hazards and to implement interventions to reduce risks. Nurses are also playing a strong role in reducing the environmental impact of the health-care settings in which they work.

Understanding and applying environmental health principles should be a part of every nurse's practice. However, we know that many of you do not feel adequately prepared to be effective in assessing or preventing environmental health issues. To address this concern, CNA has developed a number of learning and information tools to help you become even more involved in helping Canadians to better manage environmental risks to their health (visit <http://environment.cna-aiic.ca>). But we can do more. All Canadians can.

On this Earth Day, I encourage you to become environmentally engaged on a number of levels. First, become more aware of environmental health issues and the role you can play to help mitigate their impact on your patients' health. Second, share this awareness and knowledge with your colleagues in the health sector and help make environmental health part of your workplace culture. Finally, share your concerns and knowledge by writing or visiting your elected government representatives. All levels of government in Canada have a role in managing environmental health hazards. For tips on engaging members of Parliament, see the "[Nursing and the Political Agenda](#)" section of CNA's website.

We all have a role to play to help make our world a healthier place. I call on you to get engaged this Earth Day and afterward.

Sincerely,

Kaaren Neufeld, RN, MN

President

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