

## Municipal Declaration of Environmental Rights — FAQs

### What are environmental rights?

Just as Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees us freedom of expression and protects us from discrimination, environmental rights would ensure that our laws and policies protect the basic elements of our survival, such as clean air, safe water and unpolluted land. Over the past 50 years, the right to a healthy environment has gained recognition faster than any other human right. Today, Canada is among a minority of countries that does not yet to recognize the right to a healthy environment.

### Is the environment a municipal issue?

Municipal governments make decisions that affect transportation, housing density, waste disposal and other issues related to the quality of the environment. Local governments also have the power to pass bylaws to protect residents from environmental harm. For example, in 1991, the Municipality of Hudson, Quebec, passed a bylaw to restrict the use of pesticides. Since then, communities across Canada have considered passing pesticide restrictions to protect the health of residents.

### What is a municipal declaration of environmental rights?

Even though our national Constitution does not formally recognize environment rights, local governments can introduce declarations of environmental rights to show their support for residents' rights to clean air, water and safe food. Declarations are also a commitment by municipalities to address local environmental concerns. Municipal declarations also have the power to draw attention to the Canadian Constitution's silence on environmental issues.

### What would a declaration of environmental rights mean in my community?

A municipal declaration of environmental rights is a commitment to decision-making principles that will protect, fulfill and promote the right to a healthy environment. A community's specific declaration might include a commitment to use the best and latest available science to ensure that the right to a healthy environment is always considered when decisions are made. A declaration can also include a commitment to set clear environmental objectives and targets for air pollution or other issues of relevance to the community. Finally, a declaration of environmental rights can ensure accountability through regular assessment and public reporting of the municipality's progress on meeting its sustainability objectives.

### Will municipal declarations support environmental rights for all Canadians?

Large-scale social change starts in our own backyards. As a growing movement of Canadians calls upon local communities to pass municipal declarations respecting people's right to live in a healthy environment, decision-makers across all provinces and territories will take notice. This will put pressure on provinces to follow suit and pass environmental bills of rights, as some provinces, including Ontario and Quebec, have already done. While these bills do not have the same force as a Charter right, they send a strong signal that Canadians are ready for change. When seven out of 10 provinces representing more than 50 per cent of the Canadian population have recognized our right to a healthy environment we turn toward the ultimate goal: adding environmental rights to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### How can I support a declaration in my community?

Canadians from coast to coast to coast are already leading grassroots campaigns to urge their local communities to make declarations of support for environmental rights. To find out how you can get involved in your community, visit [www.bluedot.ca](http://www.bluedot.ca).