

Climate cash running out

Uncertainty over funding extension worries green project proponents

By JOHN McPHEE Environment Reporter

Federal climate change money will run out at the end of the month, which could leave projects to reduce greenhouse gases up in the air.

Nova Scotia has received \$41.5 million over the past three years through the Clean Air and Climate Change Trust Fund. Municipalities, businesses and other organizations have used the money for projects such as energy efficient retrofits.

Halifax Regional Municipality received \$1.6 million over the past three years for everything from retrofitting fire stations to replacing old streetlights with LED, or light-emitting diode, fixtures.

The municipality has applied for \$3.5 million in additional funding for similar work in the last round of applications to the trust fund, said Richard MacLellan, manager of metro's sustainable environment management office.

The application deadline is Sunday.

It's not known whether the fund will be extended or if another program will be established. That uncertainty worries Mr. MacLellan.

"This money is absolutely critical," he said in an interview Thursday. "People in Nova Scotia are just getting good at doing energy efficiency projects. It would mean huge opportunities lost."

The federal money has been distributed at the provincial level by an Environment Department program called ecoNova Scotia.

It's estimated the projects administered by ecoNova Scotia will cut annual greenhouse gas emissions by about 172,000 tonnes, said Andrew Murphy, manager of air quality branch for the Environment Department.

That reduction is the equivalent of taking 38,000 vehicles off the road.

"We continue to get numerous applications," Mr. Murphy said. "We all know the challenge of dealing with air quality and climate change, that there's more that we can do."

The money has been distributed through an application system, in which a "rigorous" review process was used to select the successful projects, he said.

In addition, ecoNova Scotia chose a number of projects on its own, without an application process, which officials

were certain would reduce greenhouse gases, Mr. Murphy said.

For example, Capital Health was given \$3.5 million to convert the heating system in its buildings to run on natural gas. Oil-fired boilers have been retrofitted at the Infirmary building, Dartmouth General Hospital and the Nova Scotia Hospital. The Infirmary system also heats the nearby Citadel High School and Museum of Natural History.

A new boiler and stack must be built at the Victoria General site, which is expected to be done by June.

The total cost of the project is \$6 million, with the other money coming from the provincial gas market development fund and the Health Department, said Greg McGrath, director of engineering services at Capital Health.

It's estimated this work will cut greenhouse gas emissions from Capital Health facilities by 15,000 tonnes, to about 40,000.

Environmental groups support the federal funding program but say Ottawa must come up with a long-term plan, not simply throw money at the problem of climate change.

"It's not very forward thinking," said Gretchen Fitzgerald, director of the Atlantic chapter of the Sierra Club. "Nor will it allow our economy to recover or deal with greenhouse gas emissions."

Ottawa must do more to create jobs in such sectors as renewable energy, Ms. Fitzgerald said Thursday.

Cheryl Ratchford of the Ecology Action Centre echoed those concerns but said the climate trust fund is a good start.

"The federal government needs to continue to support municipalities and local groups," she said Thursday. "They don't have the funding to do things that are good for the environment and are cost-effective."

Environment Minister Sterling Belliveau has spoken to his federal counterpart, Jim Prentice, about the need to continue the program, a spokesman for Mr. Belliveau said Thursday.

Bruce Nunn noted that the climate trust fund is just one of 60 actions being taken by the Environment Department to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The province has set a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by 2015.

A spokeswoman for the federal ecoAction Department, which administers the funding, said she would attempt to get a comment Thursday. But nobody from the department called back.

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RICHARD MacLELLAN Manager of HRM's sustainable environment management officeedit

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