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Resource Guide

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***News in Review*, December 2008**

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2. Cell Phones and Drivers

(Length: 10:48)

3. Humanitarian Crisis In Afghanistan

(Length: 16:13)

4. Electronic Waste and China

(Length: 17:17)

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CANADA FACES A RECESSION (Length: 14:07)

As the global economic crisis continues, some economists are predicting that Canada will slide into a recession. It would be the first recession in 16 years and could hit some parts of Canada particularly hard. In this *News in Review* story we'll look at how the economic crisis is affecting the Canadian economy and what is being done to try to cushion the blow.

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CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS (Length: 10:48)

The Ontario government has introduced legislation that would ban the use of cell phones while driving. The legislation would also allow police to charge drivers for using other hand-held devices like iPods and video game players. In this *News in Review* story we'll look at why some Canadians think the ban goes too far and why others think it doesn't go far enough.

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As winter arrives in Afghanistan millions of Afghans are facing starvation. To make matters worse Taliban insurgents have started targeting aid workers, making relief efforts more dangerous and difficult. In this *News in Review* story we'll look at what one Canadian, former cabinet minister Flora MacDonald, is doing to try to help people in rural Afghanistan.

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When we dispose of electronic devices like computers and cell phones we don't throw them in the garbage. Because they contain toxic substances we dump them at places where they can be recycled. But a lot of this electronic garbage is ending up in China. In this *News in Review* story we'll look at one Chinese town, where so-called e-waste is creating a toxic nightmare.

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CANADA FACES A RECESSION

Introduction

Focus

This *CBC News in Review* story focuses on the growing economic problems that Canada is facing, along with many other countries, and examines the causes, events, and possible consequences of what appears to be a full-scale recession.

As 2008 entered its final month, Canadians were becoming more used to hearing the dreaded “r-word” from the lips of political, business, and economic experts. That word is “recession,” and anyone who is old enough to remember the last two recessions in the early 1980s and 90s, to say nothing of the Great Depression of the 1930s, will wince at the sound of it. A recession is defined as a period of economic slowdown, or “negative growth,” and its most painful result is a rise in the number of people who lose their jobs. As unemployment grows, even people who still have jobs start to cut back on purchases of non-essential goods, especially homes and cars. This drives the economy even further into recession as manufacturers cut back on production and retailers reduce inventories and lay off staff.

A recession is really a vicious circle of job losses, reduced spending, and even further job cuts. At the same time, financial pressure on governments increases because fewer people are paying taxes and more are finding it necessary to turn to social programs such as Employment Assistance (EI) or welfare. As revenues shrink and expenses mount, governments find themselves in a difficult fiscal situation and have to run up budget deficits to cover the shortfall. In addition, they may also be forced to spend more money through bailout packages to failing industries or financial institutions or through fiscal stimulus plans designed to strengthen the economy by creating new jobs, especially in infrastructure programs such as transportation and public works projects.

At the end of 2008 Canada’s difficulties were not unique, as most Western countries were facing similar problems with their economies. The United States

had been dealing with a serious credit crunch since the summer of 2007, when a number of important financial institutions went bankrupt and a wave of mortgage foreclosures drove down housing prices. For a while, it appeared that Canada might be able to escape the worst effects of the U.S. credit and mortgage crunch, but as stock markets tumbled in the fall of 2008 it was becoming more obvious that a recession was about to strike. Along with this, plummeting world prices for oil and other natural resources that Canada exports, coupled with a decline in U.S. demand for our products, were sending the clear signal that tough economic times lay ahead. The country’s top economists warned in October that a serious recession was on its way—one that could last well into 2009 or even 2010.

As talk of an imminent recession began to dominate the mass media, Canadians expressed their concerns about the economy in a number of ways. Some people, especially those employed in the troubled automotive sector, were facing the likelihood of layoffs and job losses. Communities such as Oshawa, Ontario, home to a huge General Motors plant, were experiencing a dramatic spike in the number of people in need of social assistance. With the busy Christmas season approaching, when retailers expect to make a huge percentage of their annual sales, many stores were forced to slash prices as an inducement to persuade reluctant shoppers to keep spending at the same level as in the previous year. And the real estate market, always a good indication of the economic health of the country, was also showing signs of declining. The average price of a house in the once-hot market of Toronto dropped by \$25 000 in a single month, from September to October 2008.

Did you know . . .

Bailout was looked up so often in the 2008 online version of the Merriam-Webster dictionary, that it was named the “word of the year” in 2008.

With concerns about a recession growing, government leaders in Canada and other countries were forced to deal with the crisis and reassure an increasingly anxious public that they had workable solutions to propose. The U.S. Congress had already passed a \$700-billion bailout package designed to rescue failing banks, insurance companies, and financial institutions from bankruptcy. It was also being asked to approve a similar measure to help the ailing automobile industry. President-elect Barack Obama, who had won the November 2008 election on a program of change, was unveiling a new economic team and some bold measures designed to strengthen the economy even before he officially took office. Here in Canada, Stephen Harper’s Conservatives, re-elected to another minority government, were taking a more cautious position. It decided to delay any significant announcements of new economic policies until the next federal budget was tabled in early 2009.

For those with long memories or knowledge of history, talk of a prolonged recession or even a depression was cause for great concern. The two previous recessions of the early 80s and 90s had been sharp and painful for many but had been followed by periods of great economic boom. This is the “boom and bust” pattern familiar to economists who study the business cycle. But the Great Depression of the 1930s had been something far more serious. It was international in its scope and profoundly unsettling with all of its economic, social, and political consequences, including the Second World War. With the world’s economies now even more closely interconnected through trade, financial, and communication links, it seemed likely that the next recession would also be a global one, possibly prolonged, and carrying with it potentially serious implications for Canadians, Americans, and people around the world.

To Consider

1. Why is a recession really a “vicious circle” of harmful economic events and consequences?

2. What evidence is there that Canada might fall victim to a recession?

3. What are likely to be some of the most serious consequences of a recession for Canadians?

4. Why do some people fear that the next recession might be prolonged and global in scope, like the Great Depression of the 1930s?

5. How has the recent economic turmoil affected your family or community?

CANADA FACES A RECESSION

Viewing Activities

Quote

With the economic crisis, it's clear working families have to be talking about their future just as loudly as the banks and corporations."
— John Cartwright, President, Toronto and York Labour Council (*Toronto Star*, November 23, 2008)

Part I

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. When and where did Prime Minister Stephen Harper first admit that Canada might be entering a recession?

2. How do economists define a recession? What are its main effects?

3. In what month of 2008 did stock markets in Canada, the U.S., and other countries fall dramatically? In what other years did a similar crash occur?

4. What is the impact of the economic downturn on: a) the value of the Canadian dollar and b) oil prices?

5. Why are companies involved in the petroleum industry in Alberta worried about the future of big developments such as the tar sands?

6. What is the consumer confidence index? Why has it reached such a low point?

7. When did the most recent recessions occur? In what ways is the situation today similar to and different from these past recessions?

8. What problems in the U.S. economy began to be noticed in 2007?

9. What are the "Detroit Three"? What do they want from the U.S. government?

CANADA FACES A RECESSION

The Recession and the Automobile Industry

Canada's automobile industry is one of the most important and productive sectors of the economy, employing many thousands of people. Along with those who actually work for major car manufacturing companies, such as Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, and Honda, there are many more employed by "ancillary" firms such as those producing spare parts, tires, and other products. The hub of Canada's automobile industry is located in Southern Ontario, especially the Golden Horseshoe running along the western shore of Lake Ontario from Oshawa in the east to Oakville in the west. For many years, it has been one of the most productive and prosperous areas of the country. However, the potential recession has caused dark clouds to move in over the auto industry and those whose livelihoods depend on it.

Economists viewed the automobile industry as one of the most vulnerable sectors of the economy as a recession loomed in late 2008. The Conference Board of Canada (www.conferenceboard.ca) warned that as many as 15 000 jobs in this industry could be at risk by the end of 2009 if the recession were to last that long. New vehicle production could drop by 15.3 per cent, resulting in a loss of \$1.7-billion in sales. According to Sabrina Browarski, an economist with the Conference Board, the main reason for this decline in production and sales of automobiles was a sharp reduction in demand in the United States. By the end of 2009, she forecasts that a drop in production of new cars will lead to an additional \$1-billion in losses of revenue for the "big three" automobile firms, something that has not been seen since the last recession of the early 1990s.

According to the Conference Board's report the auto industry has found itself

caught in a "maelstrom of cyclical and structural industry changes." This means that the slump in sales and production is tied to the downward turn in the business cycle that a recession signifies, and that the industry is struggling to adapt its product line to new consumer choices—especially more fuel-efficient vehicles. In addition, one of the problems faced by potential purchasers of new cars, especially in the U.S., is a shortage of credit. Most people do not pay in full for big-ticket items like a new automobile, opting instead to finance it over time.

But banks and other lending institutions in the U.S. are limiting the availability of credit to people who may be already heavily in debt or who are facing an uncertain employment position. And even the automobile companies themselves, whose dealers offer their own credit, are raising the standard required for a loan. As a result of all this, the 43 per cent of Canadians and 20 per cent of Americans who are currently leasing a vehicle are likely to be very reluctant to trade it in for a newer model until the credit market becomes more flexible and the recession appears to ebb.

In Detroit, the home of the "big three" auto companies, the alarm bells are already starting to sound in corporate boardrooms. General Motors is facing \$2.5-billion in losses over the third quarter of 2008, and Ford has lost \$129-million over the same period. Both companies have announced major layoffs and job cuts, which will have a devastating effect on communities in Michigan and other Midwestern states whose residents depend on the auto sector for their livelihoods. In November, a group of top CEOs from this industry visited Washington, D.C., to lobby the U.S. Congress for a \$25-billion bailout

package to shore up their struggling firms. While some politicians were sympathetic, others were reluctant to commit public funds to the rescue of private companies, at least before seeing a detailed business plan for how the money could be used. Many of these executives travelled to Washington on private jets and stayed in luxury hotels while there, which was noted in the media and aroused considerable negative reaction from the public.

In Ontario, the difficulties the automobile industry was facing were already having a serious impact on many people. The number of residents of Oshawa who were receiving Employment Insurance (EI) benefits shot up 96.4 per cent over a one-year period from September 2007 to 2008—the greatest increase in Canada. Windsor, another city where this industry is an important part of the local economy,

posted a 30.4 per cent increase. According to Bob Malcolmson, CEO and general manager of the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce, the decline in the U.S. economy has had a negative impact on Oshawa in particular because about 85 per cent of the cars and trucks General Motors manufactures there are destined for the slumping U.S. market. However, he noted that the economic downturn is not affecting all sectors of the local economy equally, since Oshawa is no longer a one-industry town and has diversified its economic activities in recent years.

Sources: "15,000 Canadian auto jobs at risk," *Toronto Star* online, www.wheels.ca/printArticle/476290, and "Oshawa, Ont., sees 96.4 per cent jump in regular EI recipients," Yahoo Canada News, http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/capress/081125/business/statscan_ei-recipients?printer=1

Activities

1. How are "cyclical" and "structural" problems in the economy impacting negatively on the automobile industry in Canada and the United States?

2. Why are potential buyers delaying the purchase of a new vehicle?

3. What are the CEOs of the "big three" automobile companies demanding from the U.S. Congress? Do you think they should receive it? Why or why not?

4. Why are some communities such as Oshawa, Ontario, more vulnerable to a slump in the automobile market than others?

CANADA FACES A RECESSION

Canadian and U.S. Leaders React to the Crisis

Quote

"Deficits are generally bad, but there are occasions in which deficits are not necessarily bad, but in fact they are essential." — Stephen Harper (*Toronto Star*, November 26, 2008)

As the deepening economic crisis in Canada and the U.S. became more serious in late 2008, leaders in both countries were coming under increasing pressure to introduce policies to head off a major recession. In Canada, Stephen Harper's Conservatives had recently been re-elected, but with a minority government. South of the border, the incoming Democratic administration of President-elect Barack Obama was set to take office in January 2009. However, the two leaders and their respective governments were pursuing very different approaches to the gathering economic storm.

Canada: Harper waits for the new year

The economy was a major issue in the election campaign that saw Stephen Harper's Conservatives return to power with a strengthened minority position in October 2008. However, at that time Harper and Finance Minister Jim Flaherty were reassuring Canadians that although economic conditions were deteriorating, the country was probably not heading for a full-blown recession. In addition, the Conservatives promised that they would maintain a balanced-budget policy and not put the country's finances into deficit should they be re-elected. Just over a month later, it seemed that the Harper government was reconsidering both of these statements. Flaherty admitted that it was likely Canada would be in a "technical recession" by the end of 2008, and Harper indicated that it would likely be necessary for the government to run up a short-term deficit in order to finance measures necessary to stimulate the economy in 2009.

However, unlike U.S. President-elect Barack Obama and other Western leaders, Harper appeared reluctant

to introduce any bold new policies to counter the worsening economic situation in Canada. Despite the fact that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicted in late November that Canada was heading for a recession and rising unemployment, Harper refused to give any details of a fiscal stimulus package prior to the unveiling of the next federal budget, expected in February 2009. This reluctance was puzzling, given Harper's statement at a global economic summit in Lima, Peru, in early November that the world may be facing an economic slump even more serious than the Great Depression of the 1930s. And although Flaherty promised he would address the recession in his financial update to be delivered to Parliament in early December, it was unlikely that this statement would contain any dramatic new policies. In fact, his fiscal statement caused much anger and division in the newly elected Parliament and threatened to overturn the new minority government.

The opposition parties were quick to pounce on the government's alleged foot-dragging over the recession, and also for its apparent flip-flop on the issue of fiscal deficits. Outgoing Liberal leader Stéphane Dion accused Harper of "getting it wrong" on both issues and of misleading the Canadian people during the election campaign by promising not to abandon his balanced-budget policy. For his part, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jack Layton stated that Harper was "asleep at the switch" as the country teetered on the brink of economic disaster and wondered why he was not announcing any substantial policies to deal with the crisis, as other leaders were doing.

Economists too were critical of the Harper government's inaction and reluctance to introduce new infrastructure programs that would create jobs and stimulate the economy. Avery Shenfeld, an economist at CIBC World Markets, stated: "Historically the evidence suggests that infrastructure has the biggest bang for the buck. The only problem is the delay." And Derek Holt, vice president of economics at Scotia Capital Inc., cautioned that, "if you wait till the spring, you're potentially throwing in stimulus far too late. We've got to move really quickly." These and other economic experts believed that one of the major threats to the Canadian economy was the plummeting level of consumer confidence, leading people to hesitate before making major purchases or investments. In order to restore Canadians' faith that the economic situation would turn around, these and other economists argued that it was essential for the Harper government to show that it was taking the crisis seriously and propose some sweeping, specific policies to deal with it immediately.

Team Obama unveils its program

Although he does not officially take office until January 2009, U.S. President-elect Barack Obama has not been hesitant to announce the economic policies he intends to introduce to deal with the growing recession in his country. He has also named the members of the economic team of experts he will be working with to push these policies through Congress and into reality. At a Chicago news conference a few weeks after his election, Obama told reporters that, "we are going to do what is required to jolt this economy back into shape." This would mean a massive federal fiscal stimulus plan that could cost the U.S. government up to \$700-billion and be designed to save or create 2.5 million jobs by 2011.

Obama also used the opportunity to

introduce three members of his economic team of advisors: Treasury Secretary Jim Geithner, National Economic Council director Lawrence Summers and Council for Economic Advisors director Christina Romer. Obama stated that one of his immediate actions upon assuming the presidency would be to offer a bailout package to Citigroup, the latest U.S. financial institution to go bankrupt. The reaction of Wall Street to "team Obama's" announcement was strongly positive, with the Dow-Jones industrial average showing a significant gain after days of losses.

Obama's stimulus package will focus on programs that will rebuild the country's decaying infrastructure—roads, bridges, and schools—along with developing new sources of energy to replace petroleum. In addition, the Democratic-controlled Congress will also reconsider the appeal from the CEOs of the "big three" automobile manufacturers for a \$25-billion bailout to help them avoid going bankrupt, with the potential loss of millions of jobs in that crucial sector of the U.S. economy. Obama's choices for his team of economic advisors sent out a strong signal that his administration would be taking the country in a very different direction from that of the outgoing Republican president, George W. Bush. Unlike Bush, Obama believes that there is a major role for government to play in curbing the excesses of the free-market capitalist system that can occasionally lead to financial crises, recessions, and economic hardship for many people. For example, Lawrence Summers has called for much greater oversight and government regulation of financial institutions in order to avoid the "credit crunch" that wreaked such havoc in the housing market, and for strong government action to reduce the widening income gap between rich and poor in the United States.

Further Research

To learn more about the Great Depression in Canada, visit the CBC Digital Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and explore the files "Devastating dry spells: Drought on the Prairies" and "R.B. Bennett: Triumph in Canada's 'great dark days.'"

Predictably, Republicans who now find themselves in opposition were critical of Obama's policies, condemning them as leading to bigger government and higher taxes. John Boehner, the party's leader in the House of Representatives, stated that, "families and small businesses are hurting, and they're asking for solutions that let them keep more of what they earn rather than spending more of it." But the verdict of the November 2008 U.S. election was clear, indicating that a majority of Americans wanted a new direction in the government's economic policies.

Obama in some ways was seeking to model himself and his administration after the great Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt, who first came

to power during the depths of the Great Depression in 1933. He did not hesitate to proclaim a "New Deal for the American people," that would result in a far greater role for government in managing the U.S. economy, creating new jobs, and restoring public confidence in the capitalist system. If the recession continues to worsen, then Americans may be looking to Obama as a second Roosevelt who can use his mandate from the voters to turn the economy around.

Sources: "Canada bides time, U.S. sets course," *The Globe and Mail*, November 25, 2008, and "Dion: PM got it wrong on deficit, recession," www.cbc.ca/money/story/2008/11/25/flahertyupdate.html

Analysis

1. Why was the Canadian government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper reluctant to announce any major economic policies to deal with the recession before the federal budget of early 2009?

2. In what ways are the economic policies that U.S. President-elect Barack Obama has announced so different from those of the outgoing Bush administration?

3. Which policy approach is best for dealing with the growing concerns about the economy in Canada and the United States: Harper's or Obama's? Why?

Extension Activity

Find out more about U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his "New Deal" and discuss whether you think this might be a good model for President-elect Obama to follow in dealing with the current recession.

CANADA FACES A RECESSION

A Glossary of Economic Terms

Here is a list of some important economic terms and what they mean. Try to make them active parts of your vocabulary when discussing economic issues.

Recession: A period of slow or negative economic growth, usually leading to widespread unemployment. Economists define a recession either as a period when the economy is growing at less than its long-term rate of growth, or more specifically as two consecutive quarters of the year when the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has fallen below zero. This indicates that the economy has not only stopped growing, but is experiencing “negative growth.” Canada and the U.S. suffered two severe recessions during the early 1980s and 1990s, but rebounded strongly from them and witnessed considerable growth in their economies and increased prosperity during the last half of both decades. The early 2000s have also been a “boom” period in the economy, particularly in the real estate market, which now shows signs of slowing down.

Depression: A severe and prolonged recession. Economists do not have a clear or precise definition for a depression and usually point to the example of the Great Depression of the 1930s as a way of distinguishing it from the recessions that have occurred since then. During the Depression, the economies of Canada, the U.S., and many other countries ceased to grow. Unemployment skyrocketed to levels never seen before or since. Banks failed, people lost their homes, and the capitalist system came close to total collapse.

In the U.S., President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed a “New Deal” that sought to restore the economic health of the country with massive government spending on job-creation programs. But

the real solution to the problems of the Great Depression, especially widespread unemployment, proved to be the onset of the Second World War. In 1939, a decade after the Depression started, many Canadians were still without work before the demand for weapons and war materials created thousands of jobs in wartime factories, bringing the Depression to an end.

Debt: Going into debt is not viewed as a wise move, but it is sometimes necessary for individuals, companies, and even governments to do so to make investments they might not otherwise be able to afford. Individuals borrow money from banks to finance the purchase of homes, cars, and other big-ticket items that would be difficult to pay for all at one time. Companies borrow millions of dollars for investment and expansion, and even governments borrow money to finance major spending projects and programs. The national debt is the total amount of money a country’s government has raised that has not been paid off. The current estimated U.S. national debt is a staggering \$8-trillion, or approximately half the country’s GDP. By contrast, Canada’s national debt is \$460-billion (about 27 per cent of the GDP).

Deficit: A fiscal deficit occurs when a country’s government spends more in a given year than it collects from taxes and other sources of revenue. Deficits are generally viewed as undesirable but are sometimes necessary when the economy is in a recession and government spending is required to stimulate it,

Did you know . . .

Canada has balanced its books and avoided a deficit every year since 1997-98.

Note

The term *subprime* does not refer to the interest rate being charged on a mortgage. It refers to the risk associated with a borrower. A subprime mortgage is between a lender and a customer with a below-average credit rating.

by creating jobs and restoring public confidence. During the 1990s, the Liberal government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Finance Minister Paul Martin set the elimination of budgetary deficits as a high priority.

Through a combination of spending cuts and the elimination of certain government programs, the big deficits of the 1980s were slashed, and by the end of the decade, the federal government could boast that it had “balanced the budget.” It was even able to achieve budget surpluses, where more money was being collected than spent. This additional revenue was used for increased spending on social programs, reducing the national debt, and cutting personal and corporate income taxes. Since then, governments of all political stripes have generally endorsed the principle of a balanced budget and have been very reluctant to incur deficits again. However, the growing recession of late 2008 forced the Conservative government of Stephen Harper to reconsider its previous opposition to deficits in difficult economic times.

Credit crunch: Credit is any form of loan that a bank or other financial institution offers to an individual, company, or even a government. These loans must be paid back over a period of time, and include interest, which is the cost of borrowing money. A credit crunch occurs when financial institutions start to withhold loans or make the conditions for obtaining one more stringent than they previously were. When this happens, the effects on the economy can be very severe, and not only for individuals who are unable to finance big purchases on credit, but also for financial institutions who frequently lend money to each other.

The wave of bankruptcies of such firms in the United States, coupled with the collapse of the subprime mortgage

market, falling housing prices, and mortgage foreclosures, are all symptoms of the credit crunch. Many government leaders and economic experts hoped that the credit crunch would not affect other areas of the economy, such as manufacturing. However, by late 2008 it was beginning to appear that it had played a major role in triggering a serious recession.

Mortgage: A loan to purchase a home. In Canada and the U.S. most people’s mortgages are issued by banks and other financial institutions and are amortized (paid back) over a lengthy period of time, with interest. The terms and conditions for the issuing of a mortgage are much more highly regulated in Canada than they are in the U.S. Many Americans with low incomes were able to obtain subprime mortgages at low rates of interest with almost zero down payment required on the homes they were buying.

After a period of time, the interest rates on these mortgages increased dramatically, making it difficult for the owners to make their monthly mortgage payments. In addition, falling housing prices put many people into a position of “negative equity,” meaning that the outstanding amount of the mortgage on their home was greater than the property was worth. This led to a wave of foreclosures across the country. Because government regulations in Canada make the issuing of subprime mortgages almost impossible, it is unlikely that such a situation can occur in this country. However, in a recession, housing prices have a tendency to fall as people either hold back on purchasing a home or wait until the recession bottoms out and buy before house prices start to rise again.

Sources: “Economics A-Z,” www.economist.com/research/economics/searchActionTerms.cfm, “A quick romp through the credit crunch,” CBC News

In Depth: Personal Finance, www.cbc.ca/news/background/personalfinance/subprime.html, and "The U.S. subprime mortgage meltdown," CBC News In

Depth: Personal Finance, www.cbc.ca/news/bckground/personalfinance/mortgage-meltdown.html

Inquiry

1. What is the major difference between a recession and a depression? Why do you think many economists and government leaders are reluctant to use these words in describing economic conditions?

2. Why do governments try to keep their budgets balanced? When it is advisable for them not to do so and instead incur budgetary deficits?

3. Why was the "credit crunch" that started in the U.S. in 2007 such a serious problem for that country's economy?

4. How is the issuing of mortgages in Canada more tightly regulated than in the United States?

5. In your view, how likely is Canada to enter into a recession or a depression? Explain carefully.

CANADA FACES A RECESSION

Activity: Brainstorming Solutions

Form groups with your classmates to brainstorm and propose solutions to the economic problems Canada is likely to face should a serious recession occur starting in late 2008 and continuing into 2009 or possibly even beyond. Be prepared to share your suggestions in a full-class discussion session.

Here are some possible solutions that may assist you with this activity:

1. Personal Tax Cuts

The government cuts personal income taxes to give individuals more money to spend on the purchase of goods. This is intended to boost consumer confidence in the economy, prompt more spending, and spur economic growth. If people buy more, then companies will have to produce more and will need to rehire workers laid off by the recession.

Tax cuts sometimes can work as a stimulus to the economy, but the problem is that if people are uncertain about the future in a recession, they may choose to pocket the money rather than spend it, or use it to pay off existing debts. As a result, the government has lost much-needed revenue at a time when fewer people are paying taxes because of job losses, and demands on public funds for social assistance programs such as Employment Insurance (EI) are growing.

2. Infrastructure Program Spending

When governments invest large sums of money to build and repair roads, bridges, public transit, and other areas of transportation, more people are needed to work and the economy is boosted. In addition to this short-term benefit, infrastructure improvement programs also have a positive long-term impact on productivity and economic efficiency, in addition to providing better public transportation for Canadians.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which represents the mayors of Canada's cities and towns, is lobbying the federal government for a \$3-billion investment in infrastructure development that would grow to \$9-billion when provincial and municipal levels of government contribute matching funds to it. This investment would eventually create 100 000 new jobs in construction and other related industries. However, it is very difficult to plan such projects and achieve the agreement necessary among the three different levels of government in time to ward off the immediate effects of a major economic downturn.

3. Corporate Tax Cuts

Cutting corporate taxes encourages businesses to expand their investment and activities, requiring more jobs and thus stimulating the economy. Countries such as Ireland that have cut corporate tax rates have seen many companies locate there because they can be more profitable than elsewhere. This has had a very positive effect on the Irish economy, creating many new jobs.

A cut in corporate tax rates does increase business confidence, encouraging firms to invest their profits in expansion, research and development, and further investment. But it does little or nothing to help those companies that are not

profitable, such as the automobile firms facing slumping sales and production resulting from the recession. Instead of a tax cut, such companies are looking for a direct financial bailout in order to remain in business, which may be a risky investment for governments to make with taxpayers' money (see below).

4. Direct Financial Aid to Troubled Industries

The government chooses a struggling sector of the economy—such as the automobile industry—to receive a special financial bailout to help it avoid bankruptcy and rebuild as a stable, productive industry.

Such bailouts may be necessary. One example is the \$700-billion the U.S. Congress approved in October 2008 to assist near-bankrupt banks, financial institutions, and insurance companies. Allowing these firms to fail could have triggered a massive recession, or even a full-scale depression. But there is no guarantee that the \$25-billion the “big three” automakers have requested from the U.S. Congress would help them out of the deep financial hole in which they now find themselves. Some critics of the industry, including prominent filmmaker Michael Moore, argue that the problems of the U.S. automobile industry are largely of its own CEOs' making, and that public funds should not be used to pay for its mistakes, such as continuing to build large and fuel-inefficient vehicles that consumers no longer want or can afford to buy. In the worst-case scenario, the government could issue the bailout to a company that goes bankrupt anyway, leaving taxpayers to pick up the tab.

Source: “Can Harper fix it? The recession,” *Toronto Star*, November 26, 2008

Extension Activity

Select your best ideas and pass them on to the Prime Minister of Canada.

You can send your comments by e-mail to pm@pm.gc.ca or write or fax the Prime Minister's office at:

Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa
K1A 0A2
Fax: 613-941-6900

You might also contact your local member of Parliament or send your comments to the Letters-to-the-Editor page of your local newspaper.

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Introduction

Focus

The Ontario government decided in the fall of 2008 that driving while distracted is a major threat to public safety. This *News in Review* story looks at the legislation in Ontario banning the use of hand-held cell phones, iPods, and portable GPS units while driving as well as the debate on the effectiveness of laws governing these activities.

He was the voice crying out from the wilderness. On six occasions between 1999 and 2008, Ontario Conservative MPP John O'Toole introduced a private member's bill calling for a ban on using cell phones while driving. Each effort that O'Toole made was all but ignored by those in power. In fact, Premier McGuinty routinely dismissed the Durham MPP's calls for a ban on cell-phone use while driving because his police contacts didn't consider the issue to be that pressing a concern.

About Face

By the spring of 2008, the Ontario government dramatically shifted away from rejection of a cell-phone ban to consideration of sweeping "distracted driving" legislation in the province. Public concern over a number of fatal crashes in which cell-phone use was believed to have played a factor inspired the McGuinty Liberals to finally take action. The Liberals looked at legislation from other jurisdictions, namely Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, before introducing their own law. Ontario's Minister of Transportation, Jim Bradley, claimed that existing laws in other provinces didn't go far enough. Ontario needed to target not only cell phones, but MP3 players, GPS units, portable video game equipment, and DVD players as well. The overall goal was to create a law that would deal with all of the distracting technological gadgets that currently exist and might soon come into existence. To ensure that the new law had teeth, Bradley announced that fines would be as high as \$500 for drivers who fiddled with technological gadgets while driving.

Common Sense

Ontario legislators joined governments in Newfoundland, Quebec, and Nova Scotia in a plea for common sense. Driving requires concentration, and drivers need to avoid distractions. However, driving behaviour in all of these provinces proved that common sense was not prevailing. Newfoundland reported a spike in traffic fatalities in 2000 due to driver distraction and cell-phone use. They also reported a 22 per cent drop in injuries and fatalities after legislation banning cell-phone use while driving was introduced in 2003. Quebec claimed that cell-phone use played a role in 24 fatal car crashes between 2000 and 2006. In Ontario, a coroner's inquest looking into the death of Richard Schewe and his daughter Mikaela recommended a complete cell-phone ban (including hands-free phones). Schewe was talking on his cell phone when he drove his truck into a speeding train. Both he and his daughter were killed instantly.

Distracted Driving

According to the Canadian Automobile Association (www.caa.ca), 80 per cent of crashes are caused by distracted drivers. Meanwhile, 37 per cent of Canadians admit to using their cell phones while driving. With this level of distracted-driving behaviour, provincial governments have felt compelled to take action. Current research supports their calls for a ban on using cell phones while driving. Study after study in Canada, the United States, and Europe demonstrates that dialing or talking on a cell phone while driving is risky business. Cell-phone conversations are so distracting to drivers that they are more likely to run red lights, stop checking their mirrors,

Quote

"Having narrowly avoided a 12-car pile-up while jotting off a text message in downtown traffic recently (I'm not proud of it. I'm just saying . . .), I am (barely) living testament to the fact we need saving from our tech-obsessed selves." — Robert Cribb, technology expert (*Toronto Star*, November 8, 2008)

and get into collisions. Some liken driving while on a cell phone to driving drunk. The bottom line: the mere act of talking on the phone exponentially increases the chances of drivers getting into a crash. Perhaps Dalhousie researcher Raymond Klein put it best when he said, "We actually drive with our minds . . . and if our minds are busy, then we might make mistakes [while] driving" (CBC News, October 17, 2008).

No worries for the cell-phone industry

The cell-phone industry put up a mild fight when Ontario joined the other three provinces in declaring a cell-phone ban. They claimed that distractions abound when people drive, and it is impossible to draw a line that bans these distractions. Are provincial governments prepared to outlaw drinking a cup of coffee when driving? Are governments prepared to ban passengers from vehicles? Opponents of a cell-phone ban while driving make the point that cell phones are not the problem; distractions while driving are the problem. Has the cell-phone industry become the scapegoat in society's quest to get people to pay attention while driving? Scapegoat or not, the cell-phone industry isn't worried. Sales are booming, with 60 per cent of North Americans owning a cell phone. Meanwhile, the companies continue to cram more features into the phones; things like MP3 players and cameras are being accompanied by GPS programs and Internet browsers. Governments can ban cell-phone use while driving but they aren't going to stop people from buying and using cell phones.

Not even car makers are worried

The manufacturers of cars aren't too concerned about cell-phone bans either. They are pretty confident that any ban will be limited to hand-held units, so they are creating state-of-the-art hands-free technologies. Ford partnered with Microsoft to develop Sync, an infotainment/communication system outfitted in their vehicles. Chrysler has developed a system called MyGIG. Both of these systems allow people to access GPS programs and activate phones by voice commands. Essentially, car makers are putting more distractions into cars while making them as user-friendly as possible. Experts estimate that in-car technologies now amount to a \$10-billion-a-year industry. One commentator noted that it costs considerably more to get anti-lock breaks put on your Ford Focus SE (\$805) than it does to get Sync installed (\$495) (*Toronto Star*, March 15, 2008).

Conclusion

While the Ontario government is seeking gadget control with its distracted-driving legislation, it is uncertain whether the law will be able to withstand the wave of technology that is destined to appear in the not-too-distant future. It is one thing to go after people holding a phone up to their ears. It is quite another to control the myriad distractions—both old and new—that are bound to take drivers' minds off their primary responsibility while behind the wheel: driving safely. You have to wonder what John O'Toole thinks of all this.

Questions

1. Who is John O'Toole? What did he try to get the Ontario government to do between 1999 and 2008?
2. Why did Ontario Premier McGuinty change his mind regarding cell-phone use while driving?
3. Identify three points that support the fact that using your cell phone while driving is dangerous.
4. Why isn't the cell-phone industry worried about laws banning hand-held cell phones while driving?
5. What technologies have automakers introduced into their vehicles?
6. Do you think people will stop using their cell phones while driving?
7. In your experience, is it dangerous to use a cell phone while driving? Explain fully.
8. Will you, your friends, or family members comply readily if your province or territory enacts legislation similar to that planned for Ontario? Explain.

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Video Review

Did you know . . .

According to a 1999 study, 24 per cent of drivers in crashes had used a cell phone in the 10 minutes preceding the crash.

Quote

"iPod, Blackberry, cellphone, you name it. To tell you the truth, I have been in situations when I have been looking down and text-messaging on my Blackberry and driving with my knees."

— Peter Machalek, sales representative (*Toronto Star*, October 26, 2008)

Watch the video and answer the questions.

1. What percentage of drivers admit to using their cell phones while driving?

_____ %

2. Describe the crash that took the lives of Richard Schewe and his daughter Mikaela.

3. What does the research of Donald Redelmeier tell us about cell-phone use and driving?

4. How has the cell-phone industry responded to Redelmeier's research?

5. Why did Michael Joliffe decide to start turning his cell phone off before getting into his car?

6. What did Yoko Ishigami and Raymond Klein discover when they looked into hands-free cell-phone use?

7. How did Michael Joliffe's company AMEC take the lead when it comes to talking on a cell phone while driving?

8. What happened to Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams when a motorist saw him talking on his cell phone?

9. Describe your personal observations concerning drivers using cell phones.

CELLPHONES AND DRIVERS

The Problem: Distracted Driving

Laws banning hand-held cell phones while driving are part of an overall effort to reduce the risk to public safety caused by distracted driving. If you talk to the experts they'll tell you: efforts must be made to reduce the number of distractions motorists face. In other words, cell phones aren't the problem; the distraction caused by the cell-phone conversation is the problem. The United States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA – www.nhtsa.dot.gov) came up with a list of behaviours and circumstances that distract drivers from keeping an eye on the road. They even came up with the odds of getting into a crash based on each item. The higher the number in the list below, the more likely a collision. This list is based on odds-ratio calculations that compare the likelihood of an event happening with the likelihood of an event not occurring.

According to the NHTSA, you are putting yourself and others at risk if you take part in any of the following activities while driving.

- Reaching for a moving object – 8.8
- Paying attention to an insect inside your vehicle – 6.4
- Looking at external objects – 3.7
- Reading – 3.4
- Applying make-up – 3.1
- Dialing a cell phone – 2.8
- Inserting or retrieving a CD – 2.3
- Eating – 1.6
- Reaching for a non-moving object – 1.4
- Talking or listening on a cell phone – 1.3
- Drinking from an open container – 1.0
- Tending to personal hygiene – 0.7
- Adjusting your radio - 0.6
- Having a passenger in the front seat – 0.5

- Having a passenger in the back seat – 0.4
- Combing your hair – 0.4
- Having a child in the back seat – 0.3

Source: United States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Why pick on cell phones?

The question is: why target cell phones when there are clearly other distractions that are more risky than talking on your cell? The answer to this question comes from over a decade of research:

- A 1997 University of Toronto study concluded that drivers are four times more likely to get into a crash when they are chatting on their cell phones.
- A 2006 University of Utah study concluded that talking on a cell phone (either hand-held or hands-free) while driving is just like driving drunk.
- A 2007 University of Maryland study claimed that cell-phone users are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours like running a red light than those not using a cell phone.
- A Dalhousie University study found that people talking on hands-free devices while driving tend to fail to monitor their speed or mirrors.

Cell-phone use while driving poses a unique threat to public safety. While all distractions pose a risk, the cell phone is one risk that lawmakers think they can control. It is pretty easy for a police officer to pull over someone with a phone plastered to their ear. It is a behaviour that governments around the world feel should be limited to places other than behind a steering wheel.

What do teens think?

Did you know that drivers between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely to die in a car crash than adult drivers? Did you know that car crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injury in young people in North America? If distractions are a problem for adult drivers, they are even more of a problem for younger, less-experienced drivers. Even young drivers see that limiting distractions is essential to driving and arriving safely. According to a survey published in the journal *Pediatrics*, 25 per cent of young people consider talking on a cell phone while driving to be dangerous, and 79 per cent said that text messaging while driving is very dangerous (*The Globe and Mail*, March 6 and May 29, 2008). But will

young drivers actually avoid talking on their cell phones while driving—even if a law threatens them with fines and demerit points? If young drivers are anything like their adult counterparts, they'll reach for the phone if it rings. An Insurance Bureau of Canada survey found that 90 per cent of drivers admitted that distraction was a problem, but 60 per cent said they would continue to talk on their phones while driving despite the risks (“Distracted to death,” *The [Kitchener-Waterloo] Record*, September 10, 2008). Time will tell if new provincial laws will deter people from using their cell phones while driving. Hopefully young drivers, with a wealth of knowledge and a world ahead of them, will heed the warnings and put their cell phones away when they're behind the wheel.

Analysis

1. How serious is the problem of distracted driving?
2. Which item on the list do you think is the most dangerous? Why?
3. Have you ever been in a car where you felt that driver distraction put you at risk? Describe what happened.
4. Briefly summarize the conclusions found in the research listed above.
5. What do you think? Is talking on your cell phone while driving dangerous? What about text messaging? Will the law keep people from using their cell phones while they are behind the wheel?

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Governments React: The Global Experience

The effort to ban hand-held cell phones while driving has become an international story. Take a look at the chart below and complete the activity that follows.

Cell-phone Bans Around the World (as of 2008)

Countries that ban cell-phone use while driving*	Countries considering bans on cell-phone use while driving
Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (China), India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe	Botswana New Zealand
	Countries that ban cell-phone use while driving in some provinces/states
	Canada (4 provinces) Mexico Pakistan The United States (29 states)**
	Countries not considering a ban on cell-phone use while driving
	Sweden

Source: www.cellular-news.com

*Note: most countries ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving and allow the use of hands-free cell phones.

**Of the 29 states, six have comprehensive bans on hand-held cell phones. The other 23 states have partial bans that affect drivers in specific circumstances (e.g., new drivers, school-bus drivers).

Activity

Visit www.cellular-news.com and get the details on when and why any five countries in the list above decided to ban cell phones while driving. Are the restrictions similar among the nations you selected?

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Governments React: The Canadian Experience

Did you know . . .

Faulty GPS instructions are a source of more and more collisions. Britain's, *Mirror* newspaper reported that 300 000 British motorists have crashed or nearly crashed as a result of faulty GPS instructions (*Toronto Star*, October 6, 2008).

Newfoundland and Labrador

- The first province to pass laws concerning hand-held cell phones
- Laws banning the use of hand-held cell phones were introduced in 2002 and implemented in 2003
- Fines range from \$45 to \$180 and four demerit points
- The government says injuries and fatalities related to cell-phone use while driving dropped 22 per cent in the three years since the cell-phone ban came into effect.

Quebec

- Passed legislation in 2007 banning cell-phone use while driving
- The government found evidence linking 24 driving fatalities between 2000 and 2006 to cell-phone use.
- Fines range from \$80 to \$100 and three demerit points

Nova Scotia

- Introduced legislation in early 2008 that banned talking on a hand-held cell phones and text messaging
- Fines range from \$50 to \$200

Ontario

- Introduced distracted-driving legislation in the fall of 2008

Activity

Use the information above to write a 250- to 500-word newspaper report on the national effort to ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving.

- The legislation calls for a ban on technologies that distract drivers; these technologies include hand-held cell phones, portable GPS units, portable gaming equipment, and DVD players visible to the driver.
- Fines reach as high as \$500.

The Other Provinces

- Manitoba is expected to announce a hand-held cell-phone ban before the end of 2008.
- Prince Edward Island is considering banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving.
- New Brunswick is studying the effectiveness of hand-held cell-phone bans in other jurisdictions.
- According to an Angus Reid poll, 79 per cent of people in British Columbia support a cell-phone ban while driving (*The Vancouver Sun*, November 30, 2008); the provincial government is considering introducing legislation to ban cell-phone use while driving.
- Alberta opposes a ban on hand-held cell phones while driving .

Note: All provinces with bans on hand-held cell-phone use while driving make exceptions for 911 calls.

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Safe Driving – It's Your Call

The Canada Safety Council (CSC- www.safety-council.org) endorses the use of cell phones in cars for emergency reasons. In fact, somewhere in the neighbourhood of six million 911 calls are made from cell phones each year.

However, with over 15 million cell phones in use across Canada, the CSC acknowledges that, despite new laws and warnings, people are going to use their cell phones in their cars. While they don't endorse this behaviour, the CSC believes that if people are going to use their cell phones in their vehicles, they should follow a few basic safety tips:

- **Keep Your Hands on the Wheel.** If you have to send or receive a call while driving, make sure you can do it as hands-free as possible; this means having your phone voice-activated to respond to your verbal commands.
- **Keep Your Eyes on the Road.** If you need to send or receive a call, make sure you can do it without taking your eyes off the road.
- **Practise Off-Road.** If you need to send or receive a call while driving, practise using your phone off-road. Make sure you can press the appropriate buttons without looking at the phone.
- **Use a Hands-Free Model.** Purchase devices or enable functions that allow you to use your phone hands-free. In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario motorists have to use hands-free technologies if they choose to use their phones in the car. When available, the CSC recommends attaching the microphone to the visor just above your line of vision, so you can keep your eyes on the road. You can then talk on the phone as if you were talking to a passenger.
- **Stay in Your Lane.** Cellphones don't cause crashes, distracted drivers do. Don't get so wrapped up in a conversation that you drift into the other lane. Pull into the right-hand lane while talking, so you only have to worry about traffic on your left.
- **Use Speed Dialing.** Program frequently called numbers and local emergency numbers into the speed-dial feature of your phone for easy dialing. When available, use auto answer or voice-activated dialing.
- **Never Dial While Driving.** If you must dial manually, do so only when stopped. Pull off the road, or better yet, have a passenger dial for you.
- **Take a Message.** Let your voice-mail pick up your calls in tricky driving situations like heavy traffic or bad weather. It's easy to retrieve your messages later on.
- **Know When to Stop Talking.** Keep conversations brief so you can concentrate on your driving. If a long discussion is required, if the topic is stressful or emotional, or if driving becomes hazardous, end your call and continue when you're not in traffic.
- **Keep the Phone in a Holder.** Make sure your phone is secured in some kind of holder. That way you won't feel the need to search for it when you are driving.
- **Don't Take Notes While Driving.** If you need to take something down, use a tape recorder or pull off the road. If you have a memo function on your phone, use it to record numbers while you are talking.
- **Don't Text Message While Driving.** If dialing is risky behaviour while

driving, you have to know that text messaging is extremely dangerous. Pull over to send and receive text messages.

- Be a Wireless Samaritan. Use your cell phone to report crimes, life-threatening emergencies, collisions, or drunk drivers.
- Drive Defensively. Be prepared for the

unsafe actions of other motorists or for poor driving conditions. Do your part by staying off your cell phone unless absolutely necessary.

Source: Adapted with permission from the Canadian Safety Council (www.safety-council.org/info/traffic/cellular.html)

Activity

1. Rank the safety tips, from your personal point of view, with the most important safety tip coming first and the least important coming last. Write the ranking number to the left of each item on the page, then circle three that you would personally find difficult to do. Be prepared to explain your selections.
2. Re-write your top five safety tips in five brief, easy-to-understand sentences.

Extension Activity

Use the five sentences from above to make a safety poster that helps to educate people about the dangers of distracted driving.

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Banning Portable Technology in Schools

While governments across Canada continue to target cell-phone use while driving, school boards are banning just about every electronic gadget that might distract students from their schoolwork. In the winter of 2007, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board in Ontario voted to ban the use of personal electronic devices (PED) in their schools. The policy covered cell phones, MP3 players, and portable gaming equipment. The board was responding to staff concerns that PEDs were becoming a major headache. Teachers reported students were routinely answering cell phones in class, sending and receiving text messages, listening to music on their MP3 players, and playing the latest games on their portable game players. They also pointed out that some students were using PEDs to cheat on tests and assignments by sharing and copying answers electronically. The teachers were frustrated, and the board responded with a complete ban on PEDs.

Almost immediately, teachers scurried to their classrooms and posted signs reading “No PEDs!” School administrators vowed to confiscate the devices if they saw them out in the

open. The PED ban was greeted with surprise by some students and anger by others. One high school wound up suspending 11 students after a Facebook page vilifying the principal for the new policy was deemed to be a case of cyber-bullying. For a time, the PEDs flew below the radar, but emerging portable technologies have an addictive quality and, within a few months, students were back to dialing, texting, and listening to music around the school.

Now the PED is so prevalent that teachers and administrators do not know what to do next. Almost every student has some kind of PED—with cell phones and MP3 players being a technological staple for many in the school community. In a sense, schools in Dufferin-Peel are flooded with PEDs, so much so that enforcement of the board’s 2007 policy seems almost impossible. Nonetheless, efforts to maintain the PED ban continue. When PEDs are visible, teachers simply ask students to put them away. If the student refuses, administrators are called in to deal with the problem. Essentially, technologies that did not exist 20 years ago are becoming the classroom management flashpoint of the new era.

Questions

1. What are the rules surrounding PEDs at your school?
2. Do students follow the rules? Do teachers enforce the rules?
3. What is the rationale behind rules surrounding PEDS? In other words, why were these rules put in place?
4. Describe any PEDs that you have. Do you use them in school?
5. In your opinion, are rules banning PEDs necessary? Are they enforceable?

CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Activity: Write an Opinion

Update

As this story was being prepared, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty mused publicly about further restrictions on teenage drivers in Ontario. He promised to invite teenagers to share their thoughts with his government.

Work through the following exercise and then write a paper that clearly states your opinion regarding cell-phone use while driving or distracted driving in general.

Your Task

Work with a partner on the first two questions, below.

1. Visit the Canadian Automobile Association's Web site at www.caa.ca and type in "distracted-driving laws in Canada" in the search box. Follow the link and read about your province or territory. Make point-form notes on the laws in your area. In your view, are the laws tough enough in your province or territory?
2. Read about the laws in other provinces and territories. Write one sentence that describes the laws in each one. In your opinion which province or territory has the best distracted-driving laws in Canada?

Team up with another pair of classmates for the next question.

3. In your opinion, are cell phones being unfairly targeted by provincial and territorial governments? Use the material in "The Problem: Distracted Driving" on page 24 of this *News in Review* story and your point-form notes from above to support your position.

As a class, discuss these questions.

4. Do you think existing laws will help to eliminate distracted driving?
5. Which driving behaviours do you think are the most dangerous?
6. What emerging technologies will be the next to distract drivers?
7. Will people stop talking on their hand-held cell phones while driving? Should there be laws stopping them from talking on their hand-held cell phones? Should there be laws banning hands-free phone conversations while driving as well?
8. How likely are you to comply with distracted driving legislation? Explain.

Follow-up

Put all of the information you have gathered from the exercise above together and write a 250- to 400-word opinion paper that clearly states where you stand on the issue. You can either talk about distracted driving in general or you can focus on cell phones.

OR

Present a three-minute mini-speech outlining your views on the issue.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Introduction

Focus

In this *News in Review* story we'll look at the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. We will also explore the dangerous and difficult work being carried out by workers trying to provide aid to Afghan civilians. And we'll see what one Canadian, former cabinet minister Flora MacDonald, is doing to try to help people in some of the most remote parts of Afghanistan.

Did You Know . . .

According to the Rideau Institute (www.rideauinstitute.ca), Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan will cost the federal treasury over \$20-billion, not the \$8-billion originally estimated by the Conservative government (*Toronto Star*, October 9, 2008).

The news is often filled with stories of military casualties suffered in Afghanistan. But lately, the news has been more about aid workers being killed in the country. Aid workers, journalists, and other civilian personnel are becoming targets of the Taliban—and the situation is expected to get even worse.

Headlines on August 14, 2008, were filled with the news of an attack on an International Rescue Committee (IRC – www.theirc.org) convoy returning to Kabul. The attackers had ambushed the clearly marked IRC vehicle, forcing it into a ditch. The attackers then fired into a vehicle, killing three female aid workers and their Afghan driver. Two of the women were Canadians; the third was a U.S. citizen.

One of the Canadians was Jacqueline Kirk, a 40-year-old woman from Montreal, whose PhD dissertation was on women teachers in Pakistan. She was highly committed to international development work, having already been to Afghanistan a number of times. She had also worked in the Aceh province of Indonesia following the 2004 tsunami and participated in earthquake-relief efforts in Pakistan. She had also spent time in southern Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. Despite the dangers she would face in Afghanistan, her husband said she

was committed to her work. “She went there for the children, she wanted to help the children and especially the girls who had no other means of getting an education” (*Toronto Star*, August 14, 2008).

This is but one story of the extraordinary individuals who risk their lives to help others. There are almost 200 international aid groups working in Afghanistan. Increasingly, these aid agencies are becoming targets of the Taliban. In past conflicts, aid workers who travelled in clearly marked vehicles were considered to be relatively safe from attack. But the rules of the past do not seem to apply in Afghanistan. In fact, there don't seem to be any rules anymore. Journalists and foreign workers of all kinds are increasingly being targeted.

This new situation has created worry that a full-scale humanitarian crisis is underway in Afghanistan. Afghan civilians, already exhausted from years of war in their country, will have even less access to food, clean water, clothes, and basic medical supplies. It seems reasonable that at some point aid agencies may decide that it is just too dangerous to send their employees into Afghanistan. But if that happens, it will be the Afghan people who will suffer the most.

To Consider

1. Why do you think aid agencies have become targets of the Taliban?
2. Is there any way that these agencies or foreign governments can convince militants to leave aid convoys alone?
3. At what point is delivering aid in conflict zones simply not worth the risk?

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Video Review

Further Research

The Government of Canada has created a Web site to explain all aspects of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. At the site, entitled "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan," you will find maps, photos, videos, and text information about where Canadian personnel are located within Afghanistan, the various types of work being conducted in the country, and the names of those who have died there. Visit the site at www.afghanistan.gc.ca.

Respond to the following questions as you watch the video.

1. What is the "humanitarian crisis" in Afghanistan?

2. Record facts that show that Afghanistan is now more dangerous than ever.

3. Who is Flora MacDonald?

4. How is she being received by the Afghan people?

5. How many times has she been to Afghanistan?

6. What type of work is she doing in Afghanistan? Record specific details and examples.

Analysis

In small groups, discuss what you have learned from this *News in Review* story and answer the following questions.

1. When you consider how dangerous the situation in Afghanistan has become, why do you think Flora MacDonald continues her work in this country?

2. In what ways is MacDonald an important ambassador for Canada? In other words, what values and principles does she represent to Afghans and the international community?

3. Do you think you would ever be interested in development work in a foreign country? Explain in depth.

4. Would you ever consider such work at MacDonald's age? Why? Why not?

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Crisis on the Ground

Did You Know . . .

The average age of widows in Afghanistan is 35 years (CARE Canada).

Quote

"In the village where one of my co-operative members was born, Taliban are using what was the school as the gallows. In the past two weeks, one suspected anti-Taliban spy was hanged. A second was beaten till he cried out a confession, then also hanged, dollar bills stuffed in his mouth. When the Taliban wished to strip the body so it would hang shamefully naked for the two days during which they forbade relatives to cut it down and bury it, the villagers protested. 'Sit down and shut up,' came the answer. 'Your turn is coming.'" — Sarah Chayes, founder of a soap-making co-operative in Kandahar (*The Globe and Mail*, August 15, 2008)

In Afghanistan, a major human tragedy is gathering momentum. Hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps millions, are on the move, fearful for their lives and suffering the twin scourges of conflict and starvation. Afghanistan has suffered nearly 30 years of conflict, and recent problems with floods and drought have compounded the grim conditions facing Afghan civilians.

This winter, it is expected that the death toll for civilians will rise dramatically, as the population is exhausted and malnourished after years of war. Afghanistan is a difficult country in which to live at the best of times. Survival is not at all guaranteed here.

In fact, the odds are stacked against Afghans right from birth. In Afghanistan, for every 1 000 children born, 154 will die at birth. In Canada, for every 1 000 children born, only five will die. This is an appalling statistic, but one that is an everyday reality for mothers in Afghanistan.

In the documentary *Flora's Mission*, which aired on *CBC News: Sunday Report* in November 2008, Flora MacDonald interviews a number of village women in a region called the

Shydon Valley in the Bamyan province. One woman named Fatima explains to MacDonald that she had a lot of children, but only five lived. Colsom, another woman in the group, gave birth to 12 children; only seven survived. And Nickbot gave birth to six children, but only one survived.

These deaths would be devastating in any situation, but the women report that the deaths are even harder to take because they don't know why their children died. They don't know why because there has never been a doctor or community health worker in their village or stationed within reach of their village.

Add to this the fact that Afghan civilians live in fear of becoming targets of the Taliban themselves. On a daily basis, Afghan civilians are tortured and killed for any perceived slight against the Taliban. This includes speaking to an aid worker for one minute to provide driving directions, daring to go to school (if you are a girl), daring to teach girls, or refusing to pick up arms and join the Taliban. Life in Afghanistan is wretched and brutal for most of its citizens. It is hard to imagine how it could get much worse.

Analysis

1. Why do you think some observers refer to the humanitarian crisis as "the other war" in Afghanistan?
2. Why do you think we tend to pay more attention to the deaths of soldiers in military conflicts than to those of civilians?
3. Some people argue that if women were in charge of governments, there would be no more war. This is said because of women's roles as mothers and caregivers. Do you agree with this statement or not? Why?

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Providing Aid

Did You Know . . .

The UN estimates that fighting in Afghanistan between international forces and Taliban and Al Qaeda killed 8 000 people in 2007. Of the dead, 1 500 were Afghan civilians.

Quote

"We haven't accepted the international community so our lives would get worse. We accepted them so our lives would get better." — Afghan President Hamid Karzai reacting to increased civilian casualties at the hands of international forces (*Toronto Star*, November 27)

Quote

". . . organizations such as Britain's well-known Oxfam (www.oxfam.org), or the highly regarded Doctors Without Borders, or the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (www.gatesfoundation.org) unquestionably fill vital roles, providing health care, educating children, and distributing food." At the same time, though, these organizations "deepen the dependency of these states on outsiders." — Richard Gwyn (*Toronto Star*, July 11, 2008)

While vast amounts of money have been spent by foreign countries to fight the military conflict in Afghanistan, a mere fraction of this amount has been dedicated to providing aid on the ground to those most affected by the conflict. But even when aid in the form of food, clothes, supplies, and medicine is provided, it is difficult to get it to civilians in the country because of the worsening security situation.

John Holmes, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, states that because of the Taliban resurgence in late 2007 and early 2008, it has become much harder to provide aid to those who need it. People leave their homes and flee to the country to protect their children from the violence. It then becomes very difficult for them to get back to their homes or into areas where aid is being distributed.

The UN World Food Program distributed 220 000 tonnes of food to Afghanistan in 2007. It is estimated that this food fed an estimated 5.5 million people, out of an estimated 31 million. But 55 aid convoys were attacked during 2007, resulting in the loss of about 1 000 tonnes of food and the death of 40 humanitarian workers. A further 89 aid workers were abducted, and seven of those were later killed by their kidnappers. So it is dangerous and difficult to deliver aid to those who need it.

Analysis

1. Is there a point at which humanitarian agencies should refuse to distribute aid in conflict zones? Explain clearly.
2. If development workers have now become targets of the Taliban, is there really any way that they can be protected from harm?
3. If aid workers are pulled out of Afghanistan will the Taliban see this as a victory? Who will suffer most if this occurs?
4. How can governments protect aid workers?

Humanitarian groups have been criticizing their own governments for linking the delivery of aid to the military mission in Afghanistan. This politicizes the humanitarian work they are doing and turns them into Taliban targets. James Orbinski, former president of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning humanitarian organization Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders – www.doctorswithoutborders.org), has become a vocal critic of the way the Canadian government is operating in Afghanistan. He believes that the best thing Ottawa could do for Afghanistan would be to "decouple" humanitarian programs from military objectives. "That would dramatically affect the lives of Afghans" (*Toronto Star*, April 22, 2008).

Another complication is that the Afghan government only administers one-third of the aid flowing into the country. The rest is managed by development agencies, humanitarian groups, and private contractors. This means that the Afghan government remains dependent on outside agencies and foreign governments to provide the basic necessities for its citizens. As a result, it then becomes almost impossible for the country not to slide into further chaos once those foreign countries and agencies withdraw from the area for good.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Assistance of Flora MacDonald

Quote

"Flora is a magnificent human being. Flora has got a heart of gold. She's gone to places where even I haven't gone to. And the energy that she's got, she's got very, very sincere intentions for Afghanistan, especially for Bamyan and for the long-suffering people, the Hazara people of Bamyan." — Mustafa Zahir, Head of Afghan Environmental Protection Agency

Did you know . . .

In 2001, the Taliban blew up the world-famous Bamyan Buddhas, the largest and oldest statues of Buddha in the world. The two monumental statues of standing Buddhas were carved directly into the side of a cliff in the 16th century. The Taliban blew up the statues after imposing a strict form of Islam that forbade the worship of idols. The Buddhas were declared "un-Islamic" before they were destroyed.

Only some of the aid provided in Afghanistan comes from governments or government-sponsored agencies. Some of the aid being provided in the country comes from private donors. One example of this is the humanitarian organization Future Generations Canada. Future Generations (www.futuregen.ca) helps to provide remote villages with light, clean water, health care, and the chance for an education.

Future Generations Canada is a private organization run by Flora MacDonald, a former Canadian politician and cabinet minister. MacDonald raises all the money for the organization herself; she has only one employee, Abdullah, an Afghan local who finds out where the biggest needs are among the many poor Afghan villages. He then works with MacDonald to try to provide aid in that area.

In one project, Future Generations paid to send a couple from a remote Afghan village in Bamyan province to India to be trained as solar engineers. After their training, the husband-and-wife team returned to their village where they were able to successfully install, operate, and fix the solar energy machines provided by Future Generations. For the first time in their lives, the villagers have light and energy.

In another project, the organization was able to reduce disease in one village by providing clean drinking water. In this project, a pipe carries clean water from the mountain spring to the village taps. The new system has significantly lowered the incidence of very serious diarrhea, resulting in less chance of death for those most affected by severe diarrhea—the children and the elderly.

And through Abdullah, Future

Generations Canada was able to show a group of villagers that water could also bring them electricity. With Future Generations funding, Abdullah and the community built a micro hydro project by harnessing the village water. This allowed the community to have light for several hours during the day. Another first.

In some ways these are simple projects. They do not involve complicated mechanics, a lot of parts, or even a lot of money. Simplicity is the key to all of MacDonald's projects. She knows that for this aid to be truly successful the people must be able to set the project up themselves and keep it going long after she and Abdullah are gone.

MacDonald makes sure that both men and women receive training in Afghanistan. This is unusual in a country where most women do not enjoy basic human rights. But MacDonald knows that if women receive training and skills, they will be more respected in their villages and be able to help provide a better life for their children. This is important to her, as she was a trailblazer for Canadian women herself.

The Life of Flora MacDonald

MacDonald is used to hard work. Her grit and determination, as well as her intelligence, got her elected to the House of Commons in 1972. She was one of only five women elected at the time and the only female member of the Conservative Party in Parliament. MacDonald later became Canada's first female foreign affairs minister, in the Joe Clark government. She also held high-profile cabinet seats in the Mulroney government.

Quote

I think any woman candidate has to be prepared to work harder than most male candidates." — Flora MacDonald, 1972

MacDonald lost her seat in 1988, and since then she has dedicated herself to humanitarian work around the world. She served as president of the World Federalist Movement – Canada, and

has been involved with organizations such as CARE Canada. At the age of 80, MacDonald founded her own humanitarian organization, Future Generations Canada.

Analysis

1. What might have motivated MacDonald to found Future Generations Canada at the age of 80?

2. What does MacDonald's current and past work tell you about her as a person?

3. Can small organizations like MacDonald's actually make a difference? Or are they too small to be effective?

4. What advantages might small organizations have over larger aid organizations?

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Dangers Facing Journalists

Did you know . . .

Kidnapped foreigners in Afghanistan have previously been ransomed for up to \$3-million, sometimes with an exchange of prisoners. Canadian authorities have denied that any ransom was paid for Fung.

You know from this *News in Review* story that foreign aid workers and other civilians have become the targets of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Journalists have become targets as well. In October 2008, CBC journalist Mellissa Fung was kidnapped while she was reporting on a refugee camp in Afghanistan. She was eventually freed after being held for 28 days. The following is an excerpt from Fung's interview with the CBC's Anna Maria Tremonti on November 12, 2008 (www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/11/12/fung-intvu.html).

Mellissa Fung repeatedly told herself, "I am not dying here" during her 28-day captivity in Afghanistan, despite being stabbed in the shoulder during her abduction, the CBC journalist said Wednesday. In an exclusive interview with the CBC's Anna Maria Tremonti from an undisclosed location—her first since being released Saturday—Fung said she struck one of the armed men as she was forced into a vehicle at a refugee camp in Afghanistan on Oct. 12.

"Two guys with big guns came out of the car and grabbed me," she said. "I think I hit one, and he stabbed me in the shoulder. They stabbed me as I was getting in the car. "Next thing I knew, I was inside the car on the floor."

Fung, who is from Vancouver and is normally based in Regina, was on her second tour reporting from Afghanistan and had been in Kabul almost a month. She described the criminal gang who held her as a "family business" eager to "finish her case" and get paid a ransom.

The lead kidnapper, Khaled, was

about 19 years old, and told her his father ran the operation from Pakistan. He told her he would have preferred to take a man, because it wouldn't be "as much trouble."

"He said, 'I saw you. We were in a hurry. We needed to get out of there so we grabbed you.'" Her driver and her translator, or "fixer," were overpowered, but not taken. They were later detained by government authorities for questioning and have yet to be released.

Wounded, bleeding, and hampered by the loss of a contact lens in the abduction, Fung was then driven for about 20 minutes with one of her captors stepping on her leg to restrain her. "One of the first things they said was, 'We're not going to kill you,'" she said. "They said it in English."

She was then taken out of the car and forced to walk for three hours to her eventual prison—a damp, cold underground chamber southwest of Kabul, where she would be held until the last week before her release on Saturday. "I thought maybe I could run, but they had guns, so I didn't think that was a very good idea," she said.

Fung said her captors, who had searched her bags under the suspicion she had a GPS device with her, initially were not aware she had a cellphone in her pocket. The kidnappers soon discovered the phone when it beeped with a message. They were furious, she said, and accused her of lying, but she told them she had forgotten about it being there.

Inside the closet-sized pit at the end of the tunnel, she said, she could see daylight emerging through cracks in

Further Research

Listen to an audio clip of Mellisa Fung describing her experience (www.cbc.ca/sunday/2008/11/110908_0.html). How does listening to a verbal description differ from reading a description? Is it easier to understand the emotions Fung experienced as a prisoner when you listen to her?

the makeshift beams of the ceiling. "I was so worried about everybody, all my friends, my family," she said. "That was the hardest, most frustrating thing: I couldn't tell anybody. I just thought, 'Nobody's ever going to find me. I'm in a hole. I'm in the middle of nowhere.'"

Fung said she soon forced herself to keep positive and focus on "making plans" for when she was released, including moving to Toronto and organizing a "picnic day" with friends and family. "I know myself pretty well—that helped me," she said. "I just didn't let myself go to those places I couldn't go. . . . It's funny how your mind and body can adapt."

She said she was watched by a guard at all times and treated well by her captors, subsisting on cookies and juice given to her, and going to the bathroom in a bucket while the guard turned away. "I would maybe sleep a couple of hours at a time, and never during the day," she said. "I think I have two cavities."

Her captors allowed her to write in her notebook, which she said she used to write letters and make a detailed account of the time spent in the cave. The notebook, her bags, and camera equipment were all taken from her by her captors upon her release. "I wish I had that diary now." She said her shoulder wound turned into a "huge, ugly scab" that eventually fell off in the third week of her captivity.

She said only the lead kidnapper spoke English well enough, but she soon developed a rapport with him. "I interviewed him, because there's not much else to do," she said. She also had him swear several times on the Qur'an that he wouldn't kill her. Seeing that he appeared sincerely worried about her health, she said she faked feeling ill in the hope of

speeding up her release.

At one point, and only once during a moment of anger, she cried, only to have the lead kidnapper hold her hand and plead with her to stop, insisting she would soon be freed. "He said, 'Please don't cry, you're leaving. It will be soon. Don't cry. Don't cry.'"

She also described the night she was released and how the lead captor complained to her that he wasn't getting any ransom. "He told me, 'I am not happy. I am letting you go for no money.'" she said.

She described approaching a car parked on a road that she would soon learn belonged to Afghan intelligence officers. "We walked up to the car and my kidnapper said, 'Goodbye,'" she said. "I didn't know what was going on until a man said, 'Hello, how are you?' and put me in the back of the car."

Fung was then driven to the Kabul offices of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), where a camera was set up for her debriefing. "The last thing I wanted after 28 days was to have my picture taken," she said.

NDS chief Amrullah Saleh, she said, seemed to know all the names of the people involved. "Obviously it was not the first time they dealt with these people," she said.

She also said there was "no way" her fixer was involved in her abduction, and she pleaded for his release. "I know he didn't do it," she said. "I know he couldn't have been involved."

The Canadian and Afghan governments have insisted no ransom was paid in order to have Fung released. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has also said no political prisoners have been freed in exchange for the journalist.

News of the abduction had been

kept secret over concerns about her safety before Afghanistan's intelligence agency secured her release. Fung said she was surprised by the blackout surrounding her abduction and thanked media outlets for their co-operation. She also said she understood the current debate surrounding the decision not to report her story. "As a journalist, I'd want to report on it, but if you're talking about a life, that supercedes a good story," she said. "If it helped, then it worked, right?"

Since her release, Fung said she has had trouble sleeping, but otherwise

feels in good shape. "I am trying to erase the faces of my kidnapers in my mind," she said. "As time passes, it will fade. I want to get back to my normal life." She said she would go back to Afghanistan, but doesn't want to put her family through the pain of worrying about her.

Her biggest regret, she said, was not being able to tell the story she went to tell in the first place about the refugee camps. "Those are the people whose stories need to get out there. Those are the real casualties of this war," she said. "I still wish I could tell that story."

Analysis

In a small group discuss Mellissa Fung's story and record responses to the following questions:

1. Why are journalists like Fung targets for kidnapers?
2. Were you surprised by the treatment she received while she was held hostage? Do you think she was treated with care or not?
3. Who should be responsible for providing protection for journalists in conflict zones: local governments, foreign governments, the news agencies themselves?
4. Since the time Fung was released, there has been some criticism over the fact that a news blackout had been in effect to protect her safety. Critics have argued that news agencies do not keep other kidnappings quiet, and that their silence in this case shows a double standard, and almost demonstrates that the life of a journalist is more important than the life of others who are taken hostage. Do you agree or disagree with these critics? Explain fully.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Activity: Handling a Hostage-taking Incident

Update

As this story was being prepared, another Canadian journalist, Beverley Giesbrecht, was seized in Pakistan by suspected Taliban militants while researching a story.

In November 2008, Canadians were shocked to learn that CBC reporter Mellissa Fung had been held hostage for 28 days in Afghanistan. They were shocked to hear the news because no one knew she had been kidnapped because the international media had agreed to honour a news blackout about her kidnapping. This meant that no story about her kidnapping was printed during the 28 days she was held hostage.

Upon her release, a debate ensued about whether or not news blackouts should be used when a kidnapping has occurred. Those in favour of blackouts argue that publicity can damage the sensitive negotiations that take place after a kidnapping. Publicity can make a kidnap victim more valuable, which can lead to a longer period of captivity, or worse. As well, kidnappers have been known to offer their detainees to the highest bidder. That means they will turn the hostage over to yet another hostile group who wants to try and negotiate an even higher price for the hostage. Those against blackouts argue that freedom of the press needs to be protected in all situations—even those involving a hostage-taking incident.

Another issue raised by Fung's case is whether or not the Canadian government, or any government, should pay a ransom for the return of a hostage. Paying a fee could potentially result in the fast release of a prisoner, but it could also mean that kidnappers would be encouraged to kidnap additional targets. As well, there is no guarantee that the paying of a ransom will result in the release of a prisoner.

In Fung's case, the Canadian government was able to secure her release in return for a prisoner exchange. Although all of the details have not been released publicly, it appears that Afghan security officials were able to kidnap family members of those who were holding Fung. The security service was willing to release those family members in exchange for the release of Fung.

Your Task

You have been hired by the Canadian government to draft a kidnapping policy. In a small group, you will have to devise a policy that addresses:

- whether or not news blackouts should be mandatory
- whether a ransom should be paid to free a hostage and if so, under what conditions
- whether prisoner exchanges should be used to free a hostage, and if so, under what conditions

Be prepared to compare your policy with another group, or present your policy to the entire class.

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

Introduction

Focus

Like most developed countries, Canada produces enormous amounts of electronic waste, or e-waste. Much of this waste ends up either in landfills in Canada or in primitive recycling operations in Third World countries. This *News in Review* module visits one such operation and explores the size of the e-waste problem and some ways in which it might be reduced.

Further Research

The Basel Convention's Web site is www.basel.int.

Canadians are addicted to their electronic toys. They spend millions of dollars every year on electronic devices ranging from digital cameras to computers, video games to HD televisions. Statistics Canada, the government organization that tracks who we are and how we live, estimates that Canadians spent \$880-million in 2004 on electronics.

This expenditure is the most obvious sign of what has become our addiction to the newest and the latest. We want new products with the latest features—even if our current computer or cell phone works perfectly well. We are replacing our electronic equipment faster than ever before. And the electronics industry is thriving on this planned obsolescence.

Computers are only one example of this rapid turnover. Just a few years ago, computer owners replaced their machines on average every three or four years. Now the average Canadian computer is only 2.5 years old, and 25 per cent of computer owners replace their machines annually.

What happens to the electronic equipment we replace every year?

According to Environment Canada (www.ec.gc.ca), Canadians dumped more than 160 000 tonnes of e-waste in 2002 alone. This consisted of computer equipment, phones, televisions, stereo equipment, and small appliances. Most of this went to Canadian landfills. Environment Canada describes this amount of waste as the equivalent of about 336 000 full-sized pick-up trucks. It predicts that, unless things change, this amount will rise to 206 000 tonnes by 2010, which would be enough e-waste to fill 430 Olympic-size swimming pools.

But it's not just the amount of e-waste that is the problem; it's also the toxic

metals and chemicals that the waste contains. According to Statistics Canada, this includes 4 700 tonnes of lead, 4.5 tonnes of cadmium and 1.1 tonnes of mercury. All of these are known to be serious threats to health.

Not all of the landfills are in Canada. As early as 2002, the CBC television program *Marketplace* turned up Canadian computers in a Chinese landfill (some were from the Department of National Defence!).

In 2006, a federal government investigation found 50 shipping containers in Vancouver filled with 500 000 kilograms of plastic and metal waste destined for China and Hong Kong. Much of it was toxic computer waste. Its origin could not be precisely determined, but it seemed to come from a mixture of private and public—including government—sources in Ontario and Quebec.

The Basel Convention

International trade in e-waste is not supposed to happen. In 1989, a number of countries negotiated the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. The Convention came into effect in 1992, and 170 countries have signed the agreement. Unfortunately, not all of them have fully ratified the agreement as amended in 1996. Among those countries are Canada and the United States.

The Basel Action Network (BAN), an independent organization based in Seattle, Washington, is dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the Basel Convention. BAN has little nice to say about the work of either Canada or the U.S.

Further Research

A description of provincial regulations dealing with e-waste disposal is available at www.greensupplyline.com/howto/197007195.

“In the U.S. and Canada, the laws governing the export of trade in hazardous electronic waste are tragically inadequate, and thus these two countries are the primary sources of the global crisis. The U.S. is the only developed country in the world that has failed to ratify the 1989 Basel Convention, an international treaty controlling trade in hazardous waste from richer to poorer countries. In 1995, that treaty adopted a full ban on exports from rich to poorer countries. Both the U.S. and Canada actively oppose this prohibition. In Canada, the Basel Convention is not properly implemented, allowing almost all e-waste to flow abroad freely. In both countries, then, it is perfectly legal for businesses to maximize profit by exporting toxic electronics to developing countries, even when this export is a violation of the laws of importing countries. The export of toxic electronic waste to developing countries disproportionately burdens them with a toxic legacy and allows for externalization of real costs” (www.e-stewards.org/ewaste_crisis.html).

Along with Australia and New

Zealand, Canada and the U.S. appear on BAN’s “Hall of Shame” as “actively working to undermine the Basel Convention’s Ban Decision and Amendment designed to end the dumping of hazardous wastes from rich to poorer nations” (www.ban.org/main/hall_of_shame.html).

E-waste from Canada continues to be exported to other countries—even to countries that, like China, specifically ban its import from abroad. The actions of some Canadian recycling companies are in clear violation of Chinese law. Some e-waste still makes its way from Europe to developing countries. However, the European Union has enacted strong national laws to deal with e-waste domestically and to prevent its export. Neither Canada nor the United States has done so. In both countries it is left to the individual provinces or states to deal with the problem.

The video that accompanies this story describes the problems that have resulted in one community only: Guiyu, China. But this scene is repeated in other communities in China, Pakistan, India, and at least three African countries.

For Discussion (and, hopefully, Action!)

At some point in the very near future, all of us are likely to have to dispose of a piece of electronic equipment. Many experts have made the point that consumers should be very skeptical when they give up such equipment for recycling, even to non-profit organizations and charities. Do you know a responsible recycling company in your area? Does your school have one it uses that it has vetted and could recommend? If not, would you and your classmates commit to locating such a recycling company and promoting its use in your community? How might you go about locating such a company?

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

Video Review

Further Research

The CBS program *60 Minutes* devoted a segment of one of their programs to the e-waste problem in Guiyu. That segment, "The Wasteland," is available online at www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4586903n.

Answer the questions in the spaces provided.

1. On what "industry" does Guiyu's economy depend?

2. On what industry did Guiyu's economy depend 20 years ago?

3. What group does most of the "dirty work" in Guiyu?

4. What percentage of the children in Guiyu have high levels of lead in their blood? _____%
5. Why are illegal recycling methods permitted in Guiyu?

6. When did the Basel Action Network (BAN) first expose the situation in Guiyu?

7. What resulted from the exposés by BAN and Greenpeace?

8. What metal is collected when circuit boards are burned?

9. Where does most of the e-waste enter China?

10. How much e-waste is shipped annually to Mainland China?

11. From where is most Canadian e-waste shipped? _____
12. Where did the Technotrash representative say their containers of e-trash were headed? _____
Where did they end up? _____
13. How many containers did Environment Canada and Canada Customs inspect in 2006, their "best enforcement year"? _____
How many companies were fined as a result? _____

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

E-Garbage: The Problem in Guiyu

Guiyu is only one of a group of Chinese towns where there has been an ongoing problem with electronic waste.

In 2000, China specifically banned the import of electronic waste, recognizing that it had a problem in some parts of the country. Recycling practices in these areas were clearly unsound. But this action failed to stop the illegal trade in these goods.

This failure was highlighted in 2002, when the Basel Action Network (BAN) released a documentary film titled *Exporting Harm*. The film focused on Guiyu, which is in Guangdong Province, very close to the port of Hong Kong. The film showed entire families working to extract valuable components from old electronic equipment—and doing it using the most primitive methods available.

Typical of the methods used are acid baths and open fires, which result in toxic fumes and acid spillage. Many toxins end up in landfills, where they leach into the ground and the water supply. Drinking water for Guiyu has to be trucked in from over 30 km away.

A typical study of Guiyu's recycling operation found that dust in the roads around the e-waste operations contained 370 times more lead than samples taken 30 km away. It also found that lead levels in the town's school grounds were up to six times the limit allowed for Canadian schools.

Other recent studies have shown that the air near the salvage operations has the highest amount of dioxin, a suspected carcinogen (cancer-producing product), measured anywhere in the world. The soil, in turn, is saturated with it. The blood of the workers contains high levels of flame retardants; so do plants and animals in the area.

The size of the salvage operation in Guiyu is enormous. About 150 000 people are involved in the business. Typically, they are paid anywhere from \$2 to \$4 per day.

More recent investigations by BAN in 2004 and Greenpeace in 2005 have shown that illegal recycling continues, despite efforts by the Chinese government to bring it under control. There are a number of reasons why this is so.

- China needs the raw materials that salvage provides for its manufacturing sector, so many officials turn a blind eye to these illegal imports.
- Hundreds of thousands of people are employed in the industry and make a difficult living from it.
- Local governments and police benefit from the industry and actively protect local entrepreneurs from prosecution.
- The disposal of used electronic equipment remains a real problem for many Western countries. Often they turn a blind eye to the kind of practices they say they deplore. It is estimated that 70 per cent of the world's discarded computers and electronic equipment makes its way to China.
- It is far cheaper for industrialized countries to send e-waste abroad for recycling than for them to do it at home. Properly recycling a typical Canadian computer costs about \$45. Sending it as part of a container shipment to China is about 10 per cent of that cost.
- Criminal groups are believed to be involving themselves in the illegal export of e-waste. Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (www.cisc.gc.ca) predicts that organized crime will

become even more involved, as North Americans replace their television sets with new high-definition models.

Meanwhile, China pays a huge environmental price for allowing operations like those in Guiyu to continue. The World Bank has estimated that pollution and other environmental damage cost the Chinese economy about 12 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) every year. The bulk of these costs are medical, followed by damage to agriculture and marine environments.

The central government in Beijing has set environmental goals and tried to bring pollution and dangerous practices under control. They even tried to establish what they called a “Green

GDP” to measure the environmental progress in each province. Unfortunately, this program met with significant resistance—several provinces simply failed to co-operate—and the program has proven unsuccessful. The lack of co-operation by the provinces was compounded by infighting among the various government departments responsible for implementing the plan—a not uncommon problem in Chinese bureaucracies.

Finding a solution to the problems in Guiyu will not be simple. However, one thing is clear: if Western nations take responsibility for their own e-waste, the salvage industry in Guiyu will have far fewer raw materials with which to work.

For Discussion

The Basel Action Network (BAN) and Greenpeace brought the plight of Guiyu to the world’s attention, but the primitive recycling of electronic goods continues with protection from local officials. If the Guiyu recyclers are ultimately put out of business, what do you think will cause this? Will it be international pressure or a determined crackdown by the Beijing central government? What should Canada’s role be in resolving this serious global environmental problem?

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

A Global Problem

Electronic waste is a problem everywhere. Wealthy industrialized countries produce the bulk of it (although all countries produce some). In many cases, however, the poorest peoples in the world end up having to deal with it.

Canada produces a huge amount of e-waste: 160 000 tonnes. But this is nothing compared to that produced by some other countries.

The United States, as one might expect, is the world leader in the production of e-waste. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov) reported that between 1.4 and 1.7 million tonnes of computers, televisions, VCRs, monitors, cell phones, and other electronic equipment were discarded in 2005.

The British periodical *New Statesman* (February 5, 2007) reports that the average British household has about 25 electrical products and throws away five of them every year. This results in one million tonnes of e-waste every year. The amount is currently growing at a rate of five per cent per year. In fact, worldwide, e-waste is increasing faster than any other type of waste.

Dealing with all of that waste is a tremendous problem. It is only recently that most jurisdictions have taken a hard look at what they can do to see that e-waste ends up in places other than landfills. The European Union, in particular, has developed tough new regulations to ensure that unwanted electronic equipment is either reused or recycled in its country of origin. The U.S. and Canada, unfortunately, have been dragging their heels—both in developing national recycling policies and in preventing the shipments of these wastes to other countries.

Making It “Go Away”

For some time, e-waste from North America and Europe has made the trip to countries like China and India. Unscrupulous recycling firms have been able to make a quick profit by dumping their old electronics there. Now those countries are beginning to develop their own large appetites for electronic goods—and their own landfills of e-waste. Most domestic waste ends up treated like foreign waste: recycled by hand in unsafe facilities. In India, for example, only one per cent of e-waste ends up going to qualified, authorized recycling facilities.

Africa has now become one of the new destinations for e-waste, but with a bit of a twist. The Basel Action Network (BAN) has been studying shipments of computers to Africa, specifically through the Nigerian port of Lagos. It has determined that about 400 000 used computers a month travel through the port.

The computers are usually officially described as good-quality, second-hand equipment. Many of them are donations made through charitable agencies. But often the containers are filled with non-functioning CPUs, cell phones, and televisions—e-waste. Working with local experts, BAN has determined that anywhere from 25 to 75 per cent of any shipment is likely to be e-waste (www.ban.org/BANreports/10-24-05/documents/ExecutiveSummary.pdf).

These shipments are not pre-tested to see if the equipment is actually functional. As a result, no one can say with certainty that e-waste smuggling is taking place, but the signs seem to point that way.

Further Research

A fine article on the shipment of e-waste to African destinations is available online from Environmental Health Perspectives at www.ehponline.org/members/2006/114-4/spheres.html.

Further Research

An excellent presentation on the shipment of e-waste to Africa, including a video, is available from Consumers International at www.consumersinternational.org/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=97534.

The centre of Nigeria's computer industry is the Ikeja Computer Village. (At the end of November 2008 it was shut down by the government, which accused its vendors of failing to pay their personal income taxes.). Dealers there report that close to 75 per cent of the electronics shipped to them are irreparable junk. This e-waste all ends up in landfills—landfills that are often informal dumps by the sides of roads or in vacant lots. Nigeria has no capacity for recycling e-waste; the environmental damage is significant.

Ghana is another country with experience in used computer shipments. Traders there report that exporters force them to take all kinds of junk in order to receive a shipping container with a few computers that actually work. Like Nigeria, Ghana has no recycling facilities.

In August 2008, Greenpeace published a study of e-waste shipments to Ghana (www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/international/press/reports/poisoning-the-poor-electronic.pdf). The report helps us understand how widespread

this problem has become. "In Ghana, the Greenpeace team documented e-waste from European, Japanese, and U.S. brands, including: Philips, Sony, Microsoft, Nokia, Dell, Canon, and Siemens. Labels revealed the equipment came from a range of organisations such as Den Kongelige Livgarde—the Danish Royal Guard, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The team saw containers of e-waste from Germany, Korea, Switzerland, and The Netherlands being opened at Tema harbour, the biggest port in Ghana. The container numbers revealed that all the European containers had been shipped via Antwerp in Belgium."

Okechukwu Ibeanu, of the UN Human Rights Council, has a clear understanding of why Third World countries accept these conditions: "Many developing countries, despite sometimes knowing the dangers of the waste, continue to accept hazardous products and toxic waste due to poverty and the quest for development" (www.cbc.ca/news/story/2008/06/26/electronic-waste.html).

For Discussion

1. Ultimately, who has to be responsible for stopping the international trade in e-waste: the nations that produce the waste or the countries that receive it? Would it be easier to stop shipments at ports of exit or ports of entry? Should the producer nations—and they are the wealthier nations—be willing to assist in both ports?
2. If the biggest producers of e-waste like Canada, Australia, and the U. S. refuse to agree to a complete ban on the export of e-waste, how likely to succeed are international attempts to stop the trade?
3. Is there anything that individuals can do to reduce this e-waste problem? Describe fully.

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

Solutions: Government and Industry

Further Research

An article describing some Canadian corporate programs for handling e-waste is available at www.canada.com/topics/technology/story.html?id=b1436790-1a5b-4d8b-a141-e5e12a8d1eeb.

Note

Another example of an environmentally responsible recycler is Free Geek Vancouver. It publishes its recycling principles at http://freegeekvancouver.org/en/computer_recycling_principles.

Did you know . . .

Greenpeace has developed a ranking system for major electronics companies to report how environmentally friendly their products are. The listing is updated every three months. The list is available online at www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/electronics/how-the-companies-line-up.

The solution to the electronic waste problem should be relatively straightforward. “According to University of Toronto professor Douglas MacDonald, consumers (including individuals, corporations, and government institutions) can do two things to help the environment: one, create cleaner and more efficient technology; and two, change their behaviour” (www.cbc.ca/news/background/environment/e-waste.html).

Corporate Solutions

Corporations can help eliminate the problem by changing the way they manufacture electronic products and by making them easier to recycle once they have outlived their usefulness.

Changing the manufacturing process involves finding ways of using fewer toxic substances in the process.

Manufacturers in the European Union are already subject to legislation banning some of the more commonly used toxins and are developing new manufacturing methods as a result.

Other manufacturers are concentrating more on the recycling process. Some companies in North America are already accepting the return of their used products for recycling. European companies are now required to do so by law.

As manufacturers become responsible for their own recycling, it is expected that they will use more easily recyclable materials in manufacturing and make it easier to dismantle their products at the end of their lives. One computer company in Asia is even experimenting with a bamboo casing for its laptops to replace the much more harmful plastic it used in the past.

But perhaps the most positive step that manufacturers could take is to reduce the amount of planned obsolescence built into electronic equipment. Two ways in which this can be done are:

1. Make electronic equipment easier to service than at present. It is often easier and cheaper to replace a product than to repair it. Some electronic items even come in sealed cases that cannot be opened for servicing.
2. Design equipment that can be readily upgraded as new and improved features are developed. Electronic equipment should be able to last more than two or three years before it becomes obsolete.

Corporations also have a responsibility to ensure that their recycling is done by reliable companies that will not pass waste on to Third World nations. More and more of these companies are appearing in Europe and in North America. Some, like Xstrata Copper of Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, the world’s largest consumer of e-scrap, are extremely successful. Xstrata smelts shredded circuit boards to extract the copper—and obtains the boards far more cheaply than normal copper scrap.

Government Actions

Governments also have a major role to play in decreasing the amount of e-waste that finds its way into landfills both at home and abroad. The members of the European Union have had to comply with a Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment directive (WEEE), which requires them to take back their products for recycling. Local authorities set up designated depots for the return of WEEE items, and the corporations pay for their operation.

Further Research

For information on the Alberta recycling program, go to www.albertarecycling.ca; for Nova Scotia, www.acestewardship.ca; for British Columbia, www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/recycling/electronics/plan.htm; for Saskatchewan, www.swepit.ca.

Although there is no federal program in Canada to ensure the recycling of e-waste, several of the provinces have taken the lead in developing new plans. The Alberta program is typical of most. It imposes an up-front fee at the time of purchase that will be used to pay recycling costs when the equipment is junked. Used equipment can be taken to a number of sites around the province.

Ontario has adopted a somewhat different approach. It collects its fees from manufacturers, importers, and assemblers of the electronic products, rather than from the consumers. As in Alberta, the funds raised are used to establish collection centres where the products can be returned for proper recycling.

Ontario has chosen to charge producers rather than consumers in the hope that this will encourage them to use more environmentally sustainable manufacturing processes. If the cost of recycling a company's products is reduced, the fees it pays for recycling will also be reduced.

But governments also need to deal with the problem of e-waste shipments

to other countries, and this is a federal responsibility. Under the Basel Convention, Canada has agreed to help restrict these shipments, but its record is spotty at best. Along with major e-waste producers like Australia and the U.S., Canada continues to refuse to sign the amendment banning outright the export of e-waste. As we have learned from the video, unless it significantly increases its inspection of shipping containers bound for Asia and Africa, much of the e-waste destined for those areas will continue to make its way there.

The Ultimate Solution?

Perhaps the best way to end this section is with the same CBC backgrounder we used to open it, and the words of Douglas MacDonald. "Repairable and replaceable products, planned durability, legislation restricting toxic elements, and waste planning are essential in dealing with the global e-waste dilemma, environmental experts say. But the real change will come when, simply put, we find other ways to find happiness and self-esteem than through the purchase of a product."

To Consider

Douglas MacDonald seems to believe that our addiction to the new and the latest is at the root of our e-waste problems. Do you agree with him that insatiable consumer demand for self-satisfaction is the real cause of the rapid growth of e-waste in Canada and other countries? Or do you blame the manufacturers and developers for creating this constant demand for "bigger and better" products? What can you and your peers do to reduce the problem?

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

Solutions: Personal

What can we do as individuals to help reduce the quantity of e-waste that finds its way into landfills here and abroad? The answer is that we can do a great deal, should we choose to.

The CBC has published several sets of suggestions in articles on its Web site. Some of these offer ways in which consumers can encourage the development of greener electronic equipment. Others make suggestions about what to do with outdated equipment when it comes time to recycle it.

Greener Gadgetry

If you want to see the development of more environmentally friendly electronic equipment, do the following:

- Write your local, provincial, and federal legislators, asking for a universal, state-regulated eco-labelling system for all consumer products.
- Don't throw discarded electronics in the garbage. Take them to recycling facilities if they exist in your province or territory. As of December 2008, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Ontario have e-waste recycling.
- Lobby your province or municipality to introduce an electronics-recycling program if it doesn't have one.
- Before purchasing any electronic or electric equipment, check out how the leading manufacturers rank environmentally in Greenpeace's Guide to Green Electronics.

Sources: Updated from www.cbc.ca/news/background/consumers/green-gadgetry.html. The Greenpeace Guide to Green Electronics is available at www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/electronics/how-the-companies-line-up.

The Three Rs

When it comes time to update or replace your electronic equipment, follow the three Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Once again, the CBC Web site (at www.cbc.ca/news/background/environment/e-waste.html) provides assistance by offering the following suggestions from Environment Canada, adapted slightly for this article:

- If possible, upgrade your computer and other electronic or electric goods rather than replace them. If an item is working well, maybe the time to replace it hasn't arrived yet.
- Check with the equipment's manufacturer to find out about product take-back policies and programs.
- Instead of throwing it out, donate your old computer equipment to a family member, friend, or a charitable organization that can put it to use. Go to www.rebootcanada.ca to find a recycling location (or school computer program). Other organizations that may be interested include Computers for Schools (cfs-ope.ic.gc.ca) and World Computer Exchange (www.worldcomputerexchange.org).
- Find an organization in your community that accepts old computer equipment for refurbishing (but check its credentials to make sure unusable items or components are actually recycled).
- Check with your local computer store or municipality to learn about disposal or recycling options in your area.
- Increase your community's awareness of the issue by passing this information on to friends and neighbours.
- Make your local technology supplier aware of your desire for pollution-preventative products.

Further Research

About.com has an article with suggestions on how Canadians might go about recycling a computer at <http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/environmentbiz/a/comprecycling1.htm>.

A Contribution Above and Beyond

If you have the right skills, your contribution can be especially significant. Alex, a 15-year-old from Westerly, Rhode Island, was inspired to take action by an article he read five years ago on e-waste. With some of his friends he founded a group called Westerly Innovations Network (WIN – <http://w-i-n.ws>). Alex and his fellow WIN members repair and update recycled

computers and then donate them to schools and individuals.

In one day, WIN collected 10 tonnes of electronic equipment for recycling. Over the past five years they have refurbished more than 300 computers and donated them to countries around the world. Branches of WIN have now been formed in other countries, including Mexico and Cameroon.

This is pretty impressive action by a small group of concerned teenagers.

Action

1. Which of the above suggestions for reducing e-waste do you think is likely to be most effective? Why?
2. Exactly how many electronics products are there in your own home? What do you do with them when they are broken or no longer required?

ELECTRONIC WASTE AND CHINA

Activity: Where Do Old Electronics Go?

Your school is likely filled with electronic equipment, and much of that equipment is probably discarded and replaced on a regular basis. What happens to the old equipment once it leaves the school?

It may be that your school has little say in where the equipment ends up; the decision may be made by a local school board or a provincial government. Somewhere, however, there will be a written policy on how electronic equipment should be disposed of. A copy of that policy is likely on file in the school office.

1. Begin by requesting a copy of the policy (you may have to ask your teacher to help you obtain this).
2. Does the policy clearly describe the conditions required for the school to declare a piece of equipment surplus?
3. Does the policy specify what should happen with each type of electronic equipment: televisions, VCRs, DVD players, computers, phones, etc.?
4. Does the disposal policy follow the Three Rs: Reduce first, then Reuse, finally Recycle? Especially important: is a new use found for any equipment that is surplus to the needs of the school, but still functioning properly?
5. Does the policy allow functional but surplus equipment to be passed on to other users or to be resold?
6. If the equipment is no longer working, are there provisions in the policy that will assure that it will be properly recycled?

Once you have reviewed the answers to these questions, can you say that you are comfortable with the procedures that your school or school board has in place for the disposal of electronic waste? Are there suggestions you would like to make to improve the policy?

In light of what you have learned about the e-waste problem, write a brief letter summarizing your assessment of the school's policy on the disposal of e-waste and suggesting any changes or improvements you feel should be made. Address the letter to your principal.

News in Review Index

A list of the stories covered last season and to date in the current season is provided below.

The complete chronological index for all 18 seasons of *News in Review*, and a subject-oriented index listing *News in Review* stories appropriate for various subject areas can be accessed through our Web site at www.cbc.ca/newsinreview. Hard copies of these indexes can also be obtained by contacting CBC Learning.

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A Community Fights Gangs and Guns
The Push to Grow More Food in Canada

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A topographic map of Asia and Australia, showing elevation and terrain. The map is overlaid with a grid and various navigation markers. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the map.

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Image credit: NASA