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Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

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• (1150)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Colleagues, we're beginning about 45 minutes later than planned because of a vote in the House of Commons. We certainly have a quorum now and we're ready to go with our witnesses. I thank them for waiting 45 minutes.

We have with us today officials from the Department of Public Works, Treasury Board, and the Department of the Environment.

Our objectives today are to flesh out some of our questions on what we call the greening of government operations government-wide, and on real estate properties management. There is some commonality there, but there is also some non-commonality. The subject matter of the meeting will perhaps swing a little bit from issue to issue, but I know the evidence will be helpful.

Is any one of the witnesses prepared to give an opening statement about their own responsibilities? It looks like Ms. Burack is. That's great. We're starting with the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

You are the director general of the office of greening government operations. Please proceed.

Ms. Ellen Burack (Director General, Office of Greening Government Operations, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to introduce my colleagues. Shirley Jen is from Treasury Board Secretariat, and Berny Latreille is from Environment Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the greening of government operations.

As you know, Public Works and Government Services is the policy lead for greening government operations. This was agreed amongst key departments in 2008. This role involves developing overall policy direction and guidance, facilitating information sharing, setting reporting standards and reporting on progress.

[English]

Environment Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, and Natural Resources Canada also have essential roles to play in providing guidance and advice in their respective areas of expertise. These include priority-setting, use of the regulatory tool box, technical

expertise, and appropriate integration with the federal sustainable development strategy in the case of Environment Canada; government-wide reporting and levers for directing and guiding action in the case of Treasury Board Secretariat; and although not here today, expertise in greenhouse gas emissions reporting and energy and natural resources issues in the case of Natural Resources Canada.

Public Works is responsible for effective leadership of this horizontal endeavour, while we and our three partners are responsible for creating a solid framework. But all departments and agencies across the government have responsibility for changing the environmental footprint of federal operations.

While we recognize that more can always be done, we have made significant progress in recent years, particularly with respect to green procurement, green buildings, and greening the fleet. I would like to briefly highlight some of our achievements in these areas.

First, on green procurement, a policy approved by Treasury Board on green procurement came into effect in April 2006. In March 2008 the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development found that satisfactory progress had been made towards its implementation. As of March 2009, Public Works has developed green procurement plans to reduce the environmental impact of 67 different types of goods and services purchased by the government. Plans for an additional 53 are also under way. This planning has allowed us to create green standing offers for a range of commodities, including IT hardware, office supplies, imaging services, printers, and furniture, making it easy and cost-effective for any department to make green purchases.

With respect to federal buildings, progress has been made on a number of fronts. For example, many departments and agencies are using the Canada Green Building Council's leadership in energy and environmental design, or LEED, tool. Public Works has a commitment to a gold standard for all our new construction, and a silver standard for all our major renovations.

Parks Canada, as another example, has built the first LEED platinum building in Canada. Public Works has built the first LEED gold office building north of the 60th parallel. Natural Resources Canada will be building a lab to the platinum standard.

We have made excellent use of such programs as the federal building initiative. Since 1991, one-third of total floor space has received energy management improvement through this program, primarily through the use of innovative financing.

We've also had success with greening our fleet. Flowing from a Treasury Board directive, as of the closing days of 2008-09, 97% of the executive vehicle fleet is considered green. In 2007-08, more than one-third of newly purchased departmental vehicles were either hybrids or vehicles capable of running on alternative fuels.

[*Translation*]

Moving forward, departments are actively working together to establish a common framework for greening government operations. Our collective objective is continuously to improve the environmental performance of federal operations and to demonstrate our commitment to sustainability.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. We are now ready to answer your questions.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Do any witnesses from the other departments have statements? No? Okay.

That's a good start. We'll now go to our members.

Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's an eight-minute round, Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I do not intend to use all my time and, if there is any left when I am finished, I will give the balance to my colleague, Ms. Hall Findlay.

Thank you for your statement which was rather brief.

I have a few concerns. As a member of the committee, I remember that, a little more than two years ago, we heard representatives of the Office of Greening Government Operations, after which we produced a report for the Minister. During that session, we learned that the office could make recommendations but did not seem to have the power to follow up in order to make sure that other government organizations implemented those recommendations. In short, it could not produce results.

I do not know who this question is for but I would like to know if there is a government authority that would be able to take effective steps, to implement evaluation criteria, to carry out assessments, to let Public Works and Government Services know when an organization has not taken action and to make it change its operations in order to make them greener.

Ms. Ellen Burack: I will try to answer your question and my colleagues can then add to it if need be.

[*English*]

My predecessor was here about two years ago with a number of colleagues from the partner departments. And you're right that the office of greening government operations, and Public Works more generally, does not have the ability to compel action on the part of departments. That said, there are a number of instruments that do bind departments. I mentioned one in the context of my statement—a Treasury Board directive relative to the executive fleet.

The policy on green procurement is an excellent example. It is a Treasury Board approved policy, and all departmental heads are responsible for implementing the policy within their departments. In addition to the requirement to implement what's in the policy, they also have the responsibility to report on their activities relative to that, through their departmental performance reports.

Guidance was provided by the Treasury Board Secretariat this year for how that's to be done. That first round of reports containing that information has yet to be completed. But for the current fiscal year there will be departmental reports relative to their obligations under that policy, to give you one example.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you.

By current fiscal year, do you mean the one that is ending next week?

Ms. Shirley Jen (Senior Director, Real Property and Material Policy Division, Treasury Board Secretariat): Yes. Departments will be required to report in 2008-09, so it is this fiscal year that is ending. They will be required to report in their departmental performance reports against their green procurement objectives.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Would this report be available to us, as a committee?

Ms. Shirley Jen: The reports on plans and priorities, as well as the departmental performance reports, are available to all Canadians. I believe they're tabled in Parliament, in fact.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that this report be brought to the attention of our clerk and that as this committee writes its report we take into account whatever that report has to say about the Treasury Board directives and the policy on green procurement.

Thank you.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have four minutes left.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): I have not been on this committee until recently. Could somebody elaborate a bit on what green actually means? I know that's a very big question, but when you're talking about procurement and IT...printers I can understand...[*Inaudible—Editor*]...

I ask this question because a while back there seemed to be a marketing blitz in the consumer realm for anything that was green. We know there was a lot of somewhat misleading misrepresentations of what green actually was. If you can elaborate a little on your criteria for green product, that would be very helpful.

Ms. Ellen Burack: I can speak to that a little bit, and Berny may have something to add.

In the policy on green procurement in particular, there is very consciously not an effort to identify a green product versus a non-green product. The policy aims to integrate environmental considerations into the decision-making process around procurement. It aims to integrate it into the planning, into the purchasing, into the use, and into the disposal elements of procurement.

With respect to planning, for example, it encourages people to question whether a thing is actually needed, whether ten are actually needed, whether everybody needs that kind of thing—those sorts of questions. Then in the purchasing there would be different kinds of questions. There are commodity teams put together with experts across government to help identify what the environmental considerations should be throughout the life cycle, and these are integrated into the commodity plans as they are developed. At the end of the day, the instrument offers products for which these considerations have been integrated.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: This is helpful, thank you. But if I'm looking at a list of products that are being acquired with a green view and see furniture listed, how does a piece of furniture qualify as green in terms of this effort?

Mr. Berny Latreille (Director, Environmental Affairs, Department of the Environment): Different approaches are used for each type of commodity, because green for one thing may be very different from green for something else. Environment Canada has participated in some of the commodity teams that Ellen mentioned, when we have some technical expertise concerning where the industry is going in terms of the environmental attributes of certain products. This way, we can help define commodity by commodity what sorts of attributes we would like to see in the government's purchases.

For furniture, for instance—and I did not personally participate in that commodity team, so I can't speak with 100% certainty about all of the things that would constitute green furniture—it could be such things as percentage of recycled content in the material that is selected, or ease of disassembly, so that components can be reused; or where furniture has some wooden components in it, whether the wood comes, for instance, from sustainably harvested forests.

These factors are really considered commodity by commodity to make sure we're doing the best we can in all of those areas.

What's nice about the process is that line departments can then know, when they are using some of the purchasing instruments coming out of this, that they are buying green by default, and then our own contracting officers are not obliged to do all of that research themselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

We just had four minutes left in that turn, so thank you, Ms. Hall Findlay.

Next is Madame Bourgeois, for eight minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I thank you for being here today. I would like to understand clearly the specific role of each of your organizations.

If I understand correctly, PWGSC needs the support of the Treasury Board Secretariat to implement plans and priorities related to the greening of government buildings and it can also call on Environment Canada for its environmental expertise. Am I correct?

I believe that the greening of operations and the greening of procurement are two very different things. The greening of operations is aimed at making our buildings greener which, I suppose, is related to air quality, water quality and building envelope. Is that correct?

• (1205)

Ms. Ellen Burack: That is one aspect of the greening of operations.

[*English*]

We have put together fairly recently a strategic framework to help us think about greening government operations. For that, we've identified four domains of activity: land, because we have a lot of land, as the federal government, and we need to be effective stewards of that land; buildings, as you mentioned; business, or what happens within the buildings, which might be green procurement or might be how we use our equipment, how much paper we consume—all those sorts of things are captured within our framework in that way—and then there is movement, which is travel, vehicles, ships, and so on.

[*Translation*]

So, it is much more than green buildings and green procurement.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You were talking about government lands. I understand that the government buys land and purchases land, which is being done by your department. I suppose that, when our government wants to buy land in order to build, you have to provide a technical assessment of that land.

Is that part of the greening process? Can you tell me briefly what this involves? Does that involve contaminants, for example?

[*English*]

Ms. Ellen Burack: Yes, I understand. In the context of our framework, the things that we consider relative to land are not necessarily the purchase of land, which I think was your direct question, but they are relative to land contamination. We have a contaminated sites program in which we deal with federal contaminated sites.

For example, for species, we use integrated pest management to deal with pests on our land and to avoid the unnecessary use of pesticides. We also have the possibility of looking for opportunities to improve our landscapes, for example, by planting more trees to absorb carbon and those kinds of things. There are a number of considerations relative to the area of land.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: When...

Sorry, go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Shirley Jen: Hello, Madam Bourgeois. I only want to add to Ms. Burack's statements.

You'll recall that I was actually here on Tuesday of this week. We talked about the life cycle of an asset and that there are really four phases, which are planning, acquisition, the use of the asset, and the disposal phase. I think one of the things that we and Ellen are collectively working on is to try to find ways to plan for being green in each phase of the life cycle of an asset, to acquire, and to ask questions about what makes a green acquisition. What are we responsible for? What kinds of due diligence should we perform? During the use of an asset, for example, how do we use printers? What's the energy usage? Should we use different types of cleaning materials?

Finally, when it comes to disposal, we need to be responsible stewards. For example, we need to ensure that any buildings or properties we dispose of have been assessed for any contamination and that the contamination is addressed or disclosed before it is sold.

Does that help a little?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I understand. I know that you try to meet the LEED Gold standard to protect the health of people, which I strongly approve. However, another issue has been brought to my attention about this. It seems that builders find it difficult to meet your requirements for new buildings because your standards are extremely high.

I have before me a document relating to a building that should have been built in D'Estimauville in 2006. According to this document, PWGSC issued two tenders and, the last time, only four out of 19 bidders could meet part of the requirements for that building in D'Estimauville. This is rather strange. I am not trying to put you in a bind, I am just trying to understand.

Are your building requirements so high that our Canadian and Quebec companies are unable to meet them?

•(1210)

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: Obviously, Mr. Chairman, I can't speak to this specific example, and I know the member doesn't expect that.

Our standards are not unreasonably high. They are leadership, but they are not outside what is possible. Canadian firms compete and are successful across the country for the work we do. In many cases, we are very pleasantly surprised to find they can surpass our environmental expectations, even when we specify these high levels of performance, and I'm quite confident the market can support the objectives we have set for our green buildings.

I would note a number of provinces are also setting themselves standards, in some cases comparable, in other cases not comparable. I'll give the example of Manitoba, where they have a green building policy, so all new construction there will be LEED silver, plus some extra effort in the area of energy conservation. Ontario and British Columbia are also requiring LEED certification for a number of their activities, as is the case in the United States.

The industry really has been moving along quite nicely in terms of its ability to support these types of green building construction.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Have I used all my time?

The Chair: Yes, you have.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Very well. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin, for eight minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank you for coming in this morning. We appreciate your testimony. We also appreciate and thank you for the positive information you've provided us this morning.

I know this is something the departments have been working toward, and your department specifically has over the last while. I'd like to commend you for the efforts and for the successes in terms of the number of LEED platinum buildings that have been constructed and the ones that are in the planning stages right now as well.

One thing that I think ties into the previous comments is the concern we've identified in our procurement discussions with some of these companies we've been speaking to.

When we talk about the four stages of uses of any purchase, obviously one of the most important is the life span or the usage stage, because even though there may be a product that is a little bit more detrimental or a little less sensitive to the environment when it's constructed, if it lasts four times longer, obviously that's something that has to be considered.

Specifically, I've spoken to some companies that have concerns in terms of procurement when it comes to supplying the government with furniture. Obviously I can see where the government...and I actually endorse the way the government has worked toward unifying or having a standard type of desk and a different type of modular system so that it can be reused and the life span can be expanded. Has there been any consideration to designing a modular system that would be government-owned, that would be able to be issued to the different competitors, so when a company does not win the contract to supply a particular modular system, then the government is tied to that company indefinitely because the modular system they may be supplying is only being supplied, or can only be supplied, by that company because of the specific nature of that modular system?

I'm looking at this from the furniture angle, but I'm also wondering about other places where this type of practice could be implemented. Is that something government is looking at or considering?

•(1215)

Ms. Ellen Burack: To the best of my knowledge, that is not being looked at, but I would like to be able to check on that and get back to you, with the caveat that as that wouldn't be specifically a green-driven initiative, then it's entirely possible it's something someone is thinking about but has not discussed with me.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I certainly don't take issue with your comment, but I suggest it possibly plays into a greening initiative. If a line of furniture or a component structure becomes obsolete simply because the manufacturer has determined that, the entire modular system becomes obsolete and there's no ability to add and subtract as government needs. We have identified the lifespan issue as the most important component of the four stages. If we can't continue the lifespan, we have a green or an environmental problem because of the disposal of the entire framework. It would have to be disassembled, disposed of, and replaced with something else.

I bring that as a suggestion. It's something I'd like our committee to investigate as we look into the procurement, but I think it needs to be noted as a possible environmental consideration as well.

Ms. Ellen Burack: I understand. I didn't mean to discount the potential environmental benefits of the approach you're describing. If it is under way, it's not under way in your green push. So I would have to ask some questions to learn whether that's something anyone is considering.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that. Thank you.

There was a question about what makes a product green. I know we had a discussion about the procurement, and there's a different consideration for office supplies compared to office furniture, and then for buying buildings.

I was a builder prior to this job. We in Alberta have something called Built Green, which is the provincial residential program for green buildings. We use LEED for commercial buildings in the province like every other province, but Built Green is an initiative of the province and what I'm familiar with. We were engaged in working on green buildings for residential construction. It was interesting when I first became aware and was being educated in this program. Sometimes I would wonder why I was getting credit for usage of a certain product, but it was tied very closely to the durability and long-lasting nature of a particular product.

I wonder if you might know or have some specifics about the LEED program, for the information of the committee, and what types of things would be integrated into the establishment of a platinum standard. Obviously design is one of those attributes. I'm wondering if you could speak to the surfaces and other components that play an important role in considering whether something would qualify for the platinum standard.

● (1220)

Ms. Ellen Burack: I'd be happy to provide material that the Canada Green Building Council has about the LEED rating system, and platinum in particular. I wouldn't be able to speak in too much technical detail. I can say that from an energy use perspective, building to a LEED platinum standard gets you a greater than 60% improvement in energy performance of the building relative to the standard. But I can't speak to the products, durability, and that sort of thing. I'd be happy to facilitate the committee in accessing those documents from the Canada Green Building Council.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I think it would be interesting to committee members to really understand what's involved in the platinum standard. A number of things are considered, and it isn't simply changing the light bulbs so they're energy efficient. It really is a feat to get a platinum building.

I understand this is a major success and something that needs to be applauded. If more information could be provided to the committee, there would be an inclusive recognition of just how amazing it is that the government has been successful in developing and building these buildings to that standard.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your attendance here today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

In interest of green procedures, you've agreed to facilitate our access to documents as opposed to delivering them.

Ms. Ellen Burack: We'll send them to you.

The Chair: The access is really important. Before we say we'd all like to have all of these documents, we should have an idea of how many pages and pounds are involved, with the realization that whenever we move documents around they have to be in two languages. This could be a multi-thousand dollar exercise before we're done. But if Mr. Warkentin is happy just to have access....

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe I could make a suggestion for the sake of saving the environment. I know that a number of these documents could be provided online in both languages, specifically when it comes to the LEED standards and various things. If you could just provide us with that link and then with whatever other documentation there is, that would be great.

Ms. Ellen Burack: Mr. Chairman, I'm quite confident that the Canada Green Building Council themselves have the documents in both languages, since a lot of construction is in locations where that would be required, so we'll provide the appropriate links to the committee.

The Chair: The links; that sounds perfect.

I'll just note that the LEED standard replicates my own personal e-mail address here on Parliament Hill, so I'd ask you to be careful as you—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I never claimed a copyright.

Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Martin, you'll have eight minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There are two issues I'd like to touch on briefly, with about equal time for each one. The first is the federal buildings initiative. I've been involved with it since 1993 and have been frustrated since then at the poor progress. You say that roughly one-third of the square footage has been affected or improved. But the program is really focused on what we call the low-hanging fruit—the easiest, simplest things, such as changing the ballasts in the fluorescents or something. There has been very little comprehensive building envelope energy retrofit work that will really bring down the operating costs. That's my first criticism.

We were hoping back then that we could show the world—or at least show the private sector—the incredible savings that can be realized through comprehensive energy retrofitting of our publicly owned buildings. It just hasn't happened, and I think it's been a real failure, personally, given the number of buildings in which we've had any real building envelope structural changes—green roofs, new window systems.... Changing the light bulbs and such stuff isn't a comprehensive energy retrofit. That's my first observation.

The second thing I'd like you to comment on is asbestos. April 1 is Asbestos Disease Awareness Day, something I'm very involved in. We have pretty much littered all of our public buildings with Canadian asbestos. These Parliament Buildings are no different.

In 2006, I believe it was, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources actually passed a unanimous report urging that we use more asbestos in our public buildings domestically and find new markets for it abroad, because we're still the second largest producer and exporter of asbestos in the world, and I guess the Canadian government is proud of it. In actual fact, we're rendering our public buildings unfit for human habitation by littering our buildings with this asbestos.

I know the LEED system does not allow the use of asbestos, so I'm wondering how many billions of dollars it is going to take. If you're going to earn any kind of LEED standard, you have to make the building safe, and that means getting the Canadian asbestos out of the rafters.

Do you see this as a barrier, first of all, to getting that kind of accreditation? And secondly, have you or has your department dealt recently with this government directive to use more asbestos, at the very point in time when the rest of the world is banning asbestos in all of its forms?

• (1225)

The Chair: There are a couple of questions or issues for somebody. We have to have some kind of response.

Mr. Pat Martin: More people die from asbestos now than from all other occupational causes combined in Canada, and especially in Quebec. Eighty per cent of all the occupationally related deaths in Quebec are now asbestos caused. So how can we be promoting it through Public Works in our buildings here?

Ms. Shirley Jen: Mr. Martin, I can't speak for Public Works; I am with the Treasury Board Secretariat. But I certainly can assure you that as far as I am aware, we have no policies or directives or standards—or guidelines, for that matter—that instruct public servants to increase the use of asbestos in their buildings.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, let me show you the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources from the 38th Parliament in 2007. It's very clear. It says we should seek out new markets abroad and promote more domestic use through our own government procurement and government buildings, which essentially means that while we're spending billions to rid this building of asbestos, you have a government directive—a unanimous report of a parliamentary committee—saying to go out there and litter the rest of the country with it. It's quite appalling, really.

The Chair: The witnesses wouldn't actually be in a position to speak for the position contained in the report of a parliamentary committee, whether it was concurred with by the House or not, but

they may have a comment on whether there is a government position on asbestos generally.

Mr. Pat Martin: If we could bring it back to the LEED question, do you deal with this when you're trying to achieve the LEED standards, be they silver or gold? How do you jive that with the fact that all of these buildings are rife with this toxin?

Ms. Ellen Burack: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I can't speak to the existence or non-existence. To the best of my knowledge, there is no directive to use more asbestos, certainly in Public Works. Public Works represents about a quarter of the federal inventory of buildings. I would be surprised if other custodians were implementing such a directive.

With respect to LEED and our commitments vis-à-vis LEED, our LEED gold commitment is for entirely new construction, so we're not dealing with any legacy issues. Our LEED silver commitment is with respect to major renovations. I'm quite confident that as part of those major renovations, any asbestos in the buildings that are being renovated is being dealt with appropriately. Certainly it has not been a problem for us to achieve our LEED silver objectives with respect to those major renovations.

With respect to existing buildings, which is to a certain extent where you've started with the federal buildings initiative program, I would note that for Public Works-owned buildings, we have a commitment to use another tool in the marketplace, the Building Owners and Managers Association's Go Green Plus program. We've already assessed 176 of our 350 buildings through that program. We've been very satisfied with the results we have received relative to those. In fact, over the course of last year, in five of the ten provinces across the country, Public Works buildings were the best performing buildings of all the buildings in the marketplace that were assessed with that BOMA Go Green Plus tool. So we're learning about the performance of our buildings through the use of that tool. We're building that learning into our building plans, and in some cases we're finding out that we have some buildings with excellent performance.

We have used the federal buildings initiative quite extensively, as have other departments. Not all buildings are appropriate for the use of that kind of mechanism. In some cases departments have had difficulty using the program because there wasn't an interest in the private sector in taking on those types of situations. In those cases, where there are good opportunities for energy efficiency savings, the custodians have taken alternative approaches.

• (1230)

Mr. Pat Martin: Could I ask a little bit of detail about that?

The Chair: If you can ask your question in five seconds.

Mr. Pat Martin: On the forms of financing for these initiatives, why are we waiting for energy service companies to pay for the energy retrofit up front? Wouldn't that be a logical place to use our Canada Pension Plan money, or just government general revenue? If the payback for a building envelope retrofit is five or seven years, and there's no outside commercial financier willing to undertake that, wouldn't it be a compelling case to do it anyway for all the right reasons? It would stimulate the economy, create jobs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Why wait for an outside contractor to say they'll do it for you if there's a business case for doing it at all?

Ms. Ellen Burack: I can speak for Public Works activity in that regard. We're not waiting. We have an active program aimed at energy efficiency related to control systems in buildings, lighting, and other things. Also, as we go through our normal repairs and maintenance of buildings, as windows and HVAC systems are being replaced, energy efficiency opportunities are seized at that time.

So I don't think it's fair to assume that because a building is not run through an ESCO and through the federal buildings initiative, it has not received energy efficiency upgrading.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hall Findlay for five.

[Translation]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have learned a new French word today and I will try to use it. I want to congratulate the government and all the people who contribute to the *écologisation* of government operations and federal buildings.

[English]

I want to follow on a little bit with my colleague's questioning about federal buildings and eco-retrofits. We're in the middle of an economic crisis. We have a government that is looking to spend an awful lot of money very quickly, and in fact the very quickly part is of particular importance. We have in opposition raised some real concerns about the timing of some of these projects getting out there, some of the challenges with infrastructure money getting out the door, but we also have a very strong understanding...and you yourself said earlier that more can always be done.

We have been advocating for some time an increased level of eco-retrofits of federal buildings, enhancing the expenditure on that. So at this particular time it seems logical that this be an area where the government spend money, and in addition there would be the long-term taxpayer money savings that energy efficiency would engender.

My question is this. When you say more can always be done, and in the context of a government looking for—to use an overused term—shovel-ready projects, where are you in hypothetically being able to use money to do significant eco-retrofitting of buildings, over and above your existing plans? Would you be able to use significant government expenditure now to accomplish some of these things in a relatively short timeframe?

• (1235)

Ms. Ellen Burack: Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding that colleagues dealing with the accelerated infrastructure spending have

been to this committee and have had a conversation about that particular program.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I'm not talking about the infrastructure program, because you're right, but I'm asking you because of your expertise in the greening efforts and your understanding of the opportunity for eco-retrofitting of government buildings, would you be able to ramp up significantly if you had more money right now to spend? So if the government were to be able to say, here, we're going to give you more money than was originally anticipated, would you be able to use that to retrofit more quickly buildings you would like to see retrofitted?

Ms. Ellen Burack: Mr. Chair, I would find it very hard to speculate about that. At this time what I can say, though, is that the environmental objectives that we have for our regular spending within Public Works and Government Services, the standards that we work towards, will be no different for the additional activities. So through the repairs and maintenance that are accelerated through that funding, there will be energy efficiency improvements seen, for example, because of that accelerated focus on repairs and maintenance and the types of repairs and maintenance that are naturally done in the course of the life of a building.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: But again, my question follows on your own comment earlier that more can always be done. In the realm of eco-retrofits of federal buildings, for example, could you do more now or over the next six to nine months if you had more money from the government to spend on this?

Ms. Ellen Burack: Mr. Chair, what I would say with respect to this is that often these projects take some time to plan and develop. Shovel-ready LEED platinum projects are not sort of on a shelf, and therefore it may not be as easy as one might think to do that kind of thing in a highly accelerated way. I feel quite uncomfortable speculating about what could or could not be done. It would involve a lot more.... I don't know what the capacity is to absorb that type of activity. My span of control is quite limited relative to what would be required to deliver the kind of program you're referring to.

The Chair: Mr. Roy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very technical question for you, Ms. Burak. At the beginning of your statement, you said that key departments agreed in 2008 to implement this policy. Which departments were you referring to? Was it Environment Canada, Public Works and Treasury Board?

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: It is those departments and about a dozen others. We focused our efforts on clarifying roles and responsibilities among those departments that have the most significant environmental footprint themselves, such as the Department of National Defence, Correctional Services, Parks Canada—the biggest landholder of the agencies—the National Research Council, and Natural Resources Canada. About 14 departments have been involved in our discussions to clarify roles and responsibilities.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: They are part of the discussions but the policy applies to all departments.

At the present time, Public Works and Government Services has a strong tendency to dispose of government buildings by selling them to the private sector and then leasing space in them. Of course, the government of Canada is not only an owner of buildings, it is also a tenant all over the country.

Do you have any standards for leased buildings? Do the high standards applying to government-owned buildings also apply to leased buildings?

• (1240)

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: You are right to raise the issue of leasing. It's an important issue, and green leasing is one of the things we are working very actively on.

For our long-term leases, we do require that buildings be LEED gold. For leases of greater than 10,000 square metres, as those leases are renewed or new leases come up, we require that a BOMA Go Green Plus assessment be done of the building so that we can evaluate our opportunity to lease that space. We ask that the landlord manage the space using a different BOMA program, the BOMA Go Green program, in new and existing buildings as well.

We think this issue is so important that we are actually working with a group of our colleagues in the provinces to develop a model green lease, if you will, some clauses that we could draw from to further green our leasing activities. It is a challenge. You can't make the same demands in every market across the country, and certainly our levers for making environmental improvements are more limited than they are when we are owners. But it is an area of significant attention that we are working on.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: I understand that challenge. I understand that you must have standards and requirements but have you reached a certain percentage? When you have to rent space, I suppose it is more difficult to find buildings meeting all your standards and requirements.

To give me an idea of the success of your operations, could you tell me what is the percentage of leased space in relation to government-owned space?

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: As far as I know, Mr. Chairman, there is no performance measure I could point to that would demonstrate in a comprehensive way the performance of our leases. Really the

approach we have taken is to have these *exigences* up front to ensure that walking into the lease we're getting the greenest possible space. But I have no further measure to offer to you on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: You referred to the end of the life cycle of products. We know that recycling company face very serious problems at this time because of the economic crisis, since the demand for some of their products has been significantly reduced. For example, the House of Commons has to get rid of several tons of paper each year.

Does the government find it difficult to dispose of products for recycling?

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: Could I ask for some clarification? You said that we've had difficulty disposing of it. Could you explain a little more about what you mean by that?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Recycling companies find it difficult to sell their products at this time. I gave you the example of paper. Is the government able to dispose of such goods as paper, computers, etc.?

[English]

Ms. Ellen Burack: To date, we haven't had difficulty disposing of it. But I can tell you that you're right and there is an issue. For something like paper, there is likely to be a cost associated with recycling paper in the future, whereas there has not been a cost associated with it in the past. Those are issues that we will have to grapple with in going forward.

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Brown, for five minutes.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you.

One thing I wanted to touch on is how you look at emerging environmental technology within the scope of government greening. For example, several years ago wind power or solar power would have been considered more efficient. I would suggest that now geothermal has the greatest benefit in a building in terms of its payback. Is there a process that looks at the success of the energy efficiency of new environmental technology?

• (1245)

Ms. Ellen Burack: It's an interesting question. As far as I know, there is no formal process for doing that. We frequently meet with companies that are interested in talking to us about their technologies. We are open to doing that. From where my office sits, we certainly work hard to make connections with them and others across the system to make sure they are able to communicate the benefits of their technologies. But as far as I know, there's no system across government for identifying specific technologies to pursue.

In the approach that we take within Public Works, which I think is a fairly widely used approach, it's results that are required as opposed to defining the technology. We will have requirements vis-à-vis the energy efficiency of a building. We may have requirements vis-à-vis a design, for example, that it must be LEED gold. It requires that a certain amount of energy must actually be generated by the building. But we wouldn't specify that the building must have a heat pump or that the building must have a certain amount of solar power.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I guess what I'm getting at is this. A few months ago I was in a meeting at Yanch Heating, which is a company in my riding. Two fellows there, Adam Smith and Chris Yanch, gave a presentation on geothermal and the different areas of the world where it's being used. They said it would be much easier to get Canadians engaged in using an exciting and progressive environmental product such as this if the government led by example. They weren't aware of any government buildings in our region that utilized geothermal. At the time, I didn't have an answer on where it might be utilized elsewhere.

Are there any examples where geothermal is currently being utilized in government buildings? Are there any plans on going forward with its greater use in government buildings?

Ms. Ellen Burack: As I mentioned, there would be no plan to specify a particular technology.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Do you know of any that are currently utilizing geothermal?

Ms. Ellen Burack: Yes, the Normand-Maurice Building in Montreal has some geothermal capacity. I've anecdotally heard that the Canada Border Services Agency has at least one facility that makes use of it. There is some out there. I suspect that the more we look to meet LEED gold and above requirements, the more we'll see that kind of energy production.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Sometimes developers build a building with the goal of getting the government as a tenant. For those individuals or those builders who are targeting the Government of Canada, how do we build an awareness that this is an element that is looked at? What attempts have been made to raise awareness that this is something the Government of Canada believes in and that we see the greening of a facility as an asset?

Ms. Ellen Burack: I can tell you about certain types of activities. For example, Public Works has a publication called *Doing Business* that is designed to reach out to companies that do business with the federal government. There recently was an article in it on a number of LEED buildings that Public Works has built. Using instruments like that, we demonstrate to Canadians our interest in pursuing that type of construction. In individual situations—when we look to build to lease, for example—that would be part of the specifications.

Mr. Patrick Brown: To what extent does it make a difference if one potential lessor has a facility that is roughly equal in cost to one that's much greener, but maybe the facility that's not green is 1% less expensive? What weight does it have in the process if the facility is greener? Is it minuscule or...?

• (1250)

Ms. Ellen Burack: It's hard to speak to that in the abstract. It's rare that just one tiny element—not that it's necessarily a tiny element—is the difference between two projects. The decision to

take one lease space over another is made on a case-by-case basis. It's not a decision that I myself am tasked with making.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I guess I'm just curious about the extent to which consideration is paid to that aspect. Do you have any sense that it's a big asset, or is it more of a small consideration?

Ms. Ellen Burack: I can tell you from a common sense perspective that if, for example, it means there will be significant energy savings, it would have a big impact. But I can't speak to the decision-making process on leasing more comprehensively than that.

I don't know if, Shirley, you have anything to add.

Ms. Shirley Jen: Maybe I can add something to this.

In our system, ministers and their deputy heads are responsible for the administration of assets under their departments. For example, the Minister of Public Works is responsible for office building accommodations. The Minister of Agriculture would be responsible for those buildings that go to support the agricultural program.

Each deputy head is responsible for preparing a sustainable development plan for his or her own department. And as part of that sustainable development plan, the particular deputy could make, in fact, a commitment to do such and such a thing with a building. It may mean things like increasing the percentage of buildings leased that are green from this percentage to that percentage. That really is very much the decision of the deputy and depends on the priority he or she puts on greening and on competing priorities, because as you're well aware, most ministers and deputies have many competing priorities.

All that is to say that I think there is a way in which that kind of emphasis on improving one's green performance in the situation you mentioned, which is to perhaps increase the consideration of green building standards, is part of that individual deputy's sustainable development goals. I would just say that it is very much, I think, a decision that would be taken by individual deputies.

The Chair: Thank you. It was a good, healthy, long overtime round.

I have indications from two or three members that they have questions. There isn't time to give each member a full round, so it would be a question or an issue. We have Madame Bourgeois, for sure. And Mr. Martin indicated that he had some kind of... No? I think it was Mr. Warkentin.

So I'll go to Ms. Bourgeois first. It won't be a full round. And then I'll go to Mr. Warkentin.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I do not want to ask a question, Mr. Chair, but to make a comment.

I would like to bring my colleagues' attention to an extremely interesting document that our researcher referred to in his paper. It is the Sustainable Development Strategies Management Review published in November 2008 by Environment Canada. When reading this document, one understands that sustainable development, which is related to the greening of operations, remains a marginal concern in the decision-making process of government and that it does not have very much bearing on the national budget and the planning of government activities. Those strategies do not have any impact on budgetary allocations.

This document also states that the present approach, developed more than 10 years ago, has not produced the expected results and that continuing in this manner will put Canada in a situation such that much more drastic steps will have to be taken.

Finally, if we keep the same approach, Environment Canada and Public Works and Government Services, which do not have the power to force any changes, will be even more criticized.

If I refer to this report, it is because we have just seen that, even if our guests have tried to put the best face possible on those issues, the fact remains that our government does not have the will to act and that, if we do not give them the tools they need... As a matter of fact, Environment Canada referred to planning. There are also obstacles between the different departments: people do not talk to each other and there are major gaps. The report refers to some successes but also to very significant failures. Therefore, I believe that our committee should try to give clear guidance and direction to federal departments.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony. Thank you very much.

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for drawing our attention to this document—as was pointed out by our researcher as well.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you.

I want to follow up on some questioning that Ms. Hall Findley was engaged in regarding the preparation for retrofitting of buildings. I've witnessed the process in other cases where departments have been moved out of a particular building for the duration of the process. We're witnessing something of that nature right here in this building we're sitting in now. There are plans for this building, and we know that it has taken several years just for the plan to be in place for where additional accommodation is going to be found, and those types of things.

I don't know if you have an update on this particular building. If you don't, that's fine; but if you do, it might be of some interest to the people around this table.

In terms of the process from the time a building is identified to the time construction can begin, what type of timeframe are we looking at if there are no stalls in funding the project? I simply ask about the time required for the work to try to find alternative accommodations and then for the whole planning and development process to

reconstruct or redevelop a building. Do you have that offhand? What would be an average time period?

Ms. Ellen Burack: We can actually speak to that.

I don't know, Berny, from your experience of having done that for your own department, if you can comment.

Mr. Berny Latreille: It's hard to think of an average. I think there are so many factors that can affect how long it takes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe then you can identify some past experiences in terms of timeframes.

Mr. Berny Latreille: Normally, if you look at the full planning cycle for this, it would be difficult to imagine any such project taking less than two years.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Okay, and that's from the time it was identified to the time the construction could begin?

Mr. Berny Latreille: No, I'm sorry, that's until the completion of the project. Again, there are so many variables, including how big the facility is, that we're talking about.

Ms. Shirley Jen: Yes, there are many variables. There's whether or not you own the land, and whether the building is a cookie-cutter type of building, or whether it's a special purpose, iconic building such as this. Obviously that factors a lot into the planning process.

It depends very much on the procurement method; for example, if it's a building that is planned, designed, and then tendered by the crown versus the crown leasing the space. So when I say "procurement method", that factors into it.

I would say that two years would be pretty amazing. I would hazard to say that for some of the buildings I know that were built over the last 15 years or so, it's not unusual at all for the process to take between, I'd say, seven to ten years. It's not unusual.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Yes, I was wondering about that.

Do you know, off the top of your head, how many government-owned buildings are in the process of moving toward that construction date in the next year or two?

I know there are many, but I was wondering if you knew a specific number or a percentage.

• (1300)

Ms. Ellen Burack: No, I'm sorry. I don't have that information.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thanks so much.

The Chair: Because of its potential for indigestion, we're probably not going to review what happened with the Justice building—enough said. Anyway, I think that's good.

If there are no further questions, we can allow the witnesses to withdraw. Thank you, Mr. Latreille, Ms. Burack, and Ms. Jen, for attending today.

Colleagues, before we go, I want to indicate that our next meeting will be focused on the estimates of the Public Service Commission. Strangely, they come under the Canadian Heritage spending envelope. But anyway, Madam Barrados from the Public Service Commission will be here.

The meeting following that—I've had some informal discussions with some members—is probably going to end up being a planning meeting immediately prior to the first meeting back on Tuesday, April 21, which is on the government's economic action plan and the stimulus package.

Next Thursday's meeting will be a planning meeting. Part of it could be in camera with some government officials to help us plan the following meeting on the government stimulus package. The staff will be working on that.

If that's okay, we are adjourned. Thank you.

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