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## The Federal Act

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was passed by Parliament in 1992 and proclaimed in 1995. Its intent is to enable the Government of Canada to "achieve sustainable development by conserving and enhancing environmental quality and by encouraging and promoting economic development that conserves and enhances environmental quality" (DOJC 2008b).

The Act is a tool to ensure that potential environmental impacts, the potential for sustainable development, and any post-project impacts have all been considered in any proposed project. The Act also encourages stakeholder input in government decisions affecting the environment, especially with Aboriginal communities (CEAA 2007a).

The Act applies to a project if there is a trigger (see below), any likely transboundary environmental effects, or if the project falls under federal authority ([CEAA 2007](#) )

- A trigger can be activated under one of [four situations](#) in which the federal authority: (1) is a [proponent](#) to the project; (2) authorizes payments or a loan for the project; (3) has the administration of federal lands and sells or disposes of the lands; or (4) issues a permit or other such approval to the project under the [Law List Regulations](#) .
- The Minister of Environment or Minister of Foreign Affairs can initiate a CEAA if a transboundary environmental effect is suspected.
- Projects can be excluded from an EIA if they fall under the [list of exclusions](#) or if they are in response to a national emergency or in response to an emergency and the project is necessary for the protection of property, health and/or the environment.
- A federal authority can include ministers, agencies, departments and prescribed bodies.

If there is any uncertainty as to whether the project requires a CEAA, the *Comprehensive Study List Regulations* describes projects that need to undergo a detailed environmental impact study. Projects included in this list are:

- large oil and natural gas developments
- large mining projects
- major pipelines
- large industrial plants

Most oil sands developments fall under one of these categories.



**Suncor Plant**  
Source: Suncor Energy Inc.  
( click to enlarge )

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