



Skills Essential For Success in the Environmental Industry

NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS BASED ON EXPERT INSIGHTS

What's Inside?

At ECO Canada, environmental careers are our business.

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Introduction:

Defining Essential Skills in the Environmental Sector

We surveyed employers, employees and industry stakeholders to determine the skills required to build a successful career in the environmental sector.

In total, 686 participants provided insights that were collected and analyzed.

Demographics

The sample size is characterized as being young, experienced, and highly educated.

- 79% of respondents were under 44 years of age
- 42% of participants have 8 or more years of environmental work experience
- 93% have a post-secondary education
 - 86% hold a bachelor's or higher
 - 38% holding a master's degree or higher

Background

The information in this guide is based on a study of training needs undertaken by ECO Canada in winter 2017.

ECO Canada conducted a similar study in 2010 to determine the training needs, how it has changed since and whether there was continuity with required skill sets for environmental work.

Methodology

The study was divided into the following activities:

- Survey of environmental employees
- Survey of environmental employers
- Individual stakeholder interviews including:
 - government representatives
 - regulators
 - industry representatives
 - environmental consultants
 - post-secondary contacts

DEFINITION OF ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Essential skills include the skills associated with literacy, but also include thinking skills, oral communication, computer use/digital skills, working with others and the skills associated with continuous learning.

They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better prepare for, get and keep a job, and adapt and succeed at work. - [OLES](#)

For the purposes of this document, ECO Canada defines the term 'essential' in the context of skills that are desirable for employment in the environmental sector and that can be built-upon for career progression.

Landscape of the Canadian Environmental Workforce

WHO ARE ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS?



364,000 environmental workers in Canada. This number is expected to grow by 90,000 jobs by 2024



60 % hold a diploma or higher but 52% report facing barriers to training



22% of the workforce is expected to retire by 2026

The next generation of young professionals must fill this gap.
Are new grads prepared with the skills needed to step into senior roles where the retiree gap exists?

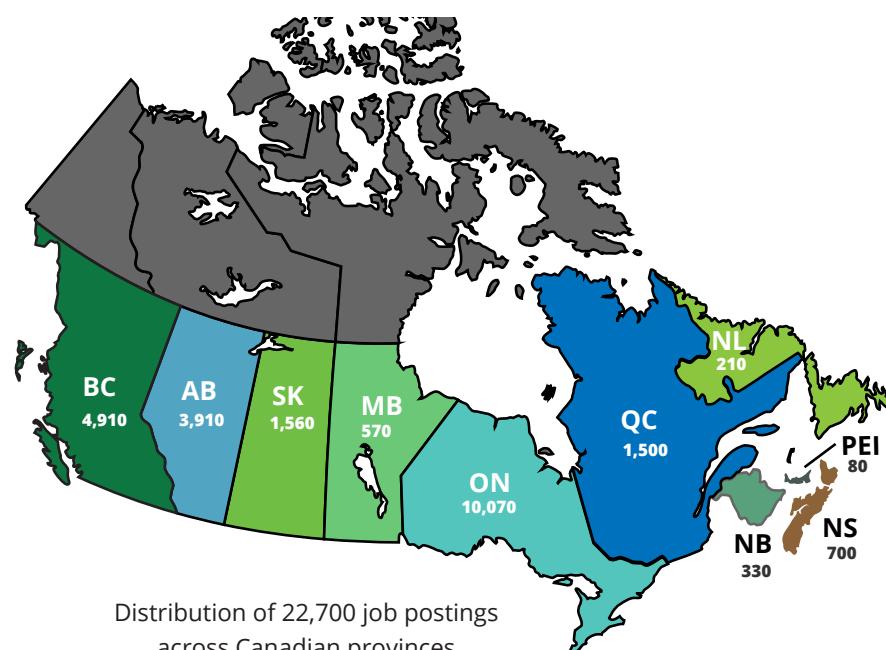
ENVIRONMENTAL WORK CAN BE FURTHER DEFINED INTO THREE SECTORS:

Environmental Protection, Resource Management and Sustainability.

Growing Employment

In 2017 environmental employment sector posted close to 23,000 more jobs than the previous year. This marks a healthy 9% increase in job postings across Canada.

From government policy-makers in the capitol to workers at remote northern sites, environmental work is critical to Canada's economy.



Key Findings: Employers Skills Most Needed to Build a Successful Career

We asked environmental experts **what soft or technical skills their employees needed training in, and what are the most important skills for environmental employees in their organizations.**

ECO Canada makes a distinction between technical skills and soft skills.

Experts identified that technical skills are the *most important* to obtain employment, but that person needs to develop soft skills to *progress in their career*. The majority of post-secondary environmental programs focus on equipping students with the foundational technical knowledge they will need to enter the workforce.

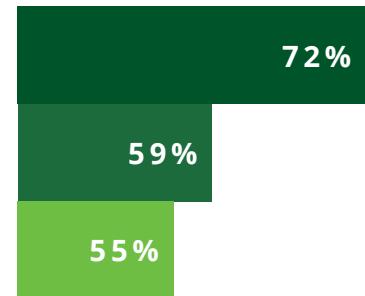
Soft skills emerged as an important component for success in the environmental sector. Junior employees lack soft skills and this gap exists because many academic curriculum do not significantly cover them, and workers are expected to develop this skill set on the job.

SOFT SKILL REQUIREMENTS

Top 5 Skills That Employers Want

	COMMUNICATION
	COLLABORATION
	PROJECT MANAGEMENT
	REPORT WRITING
	ATTITUDE

Top Soft Skills For Environmental Workers



A note about Project Management:

Project Management is a blend of both *soft* and *technical* skills. The 'soft' skills are needed to manage people and resources, but 'technical' skills are needed to meet the project requirements and objectives.

Project Management is the #1 skill across the majority of age and experience levels.

What Employers are Looking For?

TOP 5 SOFT SKILLS REQUIRED BY EMPLOYERS BASED ON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.



SOME INSIGHTS AND THEMES EMERGED FROM THE EMPLOYER FEEDBACK.

Communication was important for all experience levels.

Combined with the results from our expert stakeholder interviews, and environmental worker survey, communication is an integral skill to have in the environmental industry. It continues to be an important soft skill to develop as an experienced employee.

Communication may seem like a basic skill but think about how it relates to experience. A worker who can present clearly and professionally to a client, who can contribute to a team, who can explain technical information in everyday language is a useful asset to a company.

Leadership and conflict resolution become more important as you become more experienced.

The importance of demonstrating leadership as you gain experience follows a natural progression of taking on more responsibility as you become more experienced.

WHEN HIRING CANDIDATES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ROLES, EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR THESE 3 THINGS:



Adapt: the ability to perform both generalist and specialist functions



Flexibility to relocate: working remotely and the ability to move to other regions where the demand is



Soft skills: highlights are business communications, project management & data interpretation

WHY ARE SOFT SKILLS IMPORTANT?

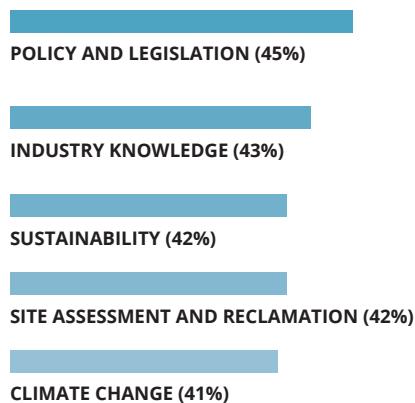
Soft skills are essential components of moving ahead for career growth. An employee with strong soft skills is valuable because:

- Employees with well-honed soft-skills are able to demonstrate leadership.
- Soft skills enable employees to communicate effectively with stakeholders. This can improve client relationships and increase business opportunities.
- Employees that can give presentations or mentor other staff also reduce organizational risks faced by the employer such as onboarding junior staff, or employee retention.
- Increases the value of your assets, especially in a business model where staff form the basis for service delivery.

Technical Skill Requirements

TECHNICAL SKILLS DEEMED MOST IMPORTANT IN OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT

TOP 5 SOUGHT AFTER TECHNICAL SKILLS



THEMES EMERGED WITHIN TECHNICAL SKILL REQUIREMENTS

Industry Knowledge was viewed by employers as most the most important to receive training in. New employees would only be able to receive training in other areas identified once they know the context they work in (technical, political and other challenges facing the industry). With environmental work spanning multiple industries, it's important to stay informed.

Policy and Legislation is viewed as the most important skill for intermediate and senior employees. This area requires ongoing training in order to keep up with changes in regulations.

Technical skills changed with level of experience

Participants were analyzed by their experience level based on years of employment. Having skills and knowledge in climate change and in research and development is deemed more important at the higher experience cohorts (mid-senior level).

TECHNICAL SKILLS ANALYSIS

TOP 5 ENVIRONMENTAL SKILLS BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

0-2 Years	3-7 Years	8+ Years
Industry Knowledge (61%)	Policy & Legislation (50%)	Policy & Legislation (42%)
Health & Safety (59%)	Industry Knowledge (48%)	Communication & Public Awareness (30%)
Communication & Public Awareness (56%)	Communication & Public Awareness (41%)	Climate Change (27%)
Policy & Legislation (55%)	Education & Training (38%)	Research & Development (27%)
Sustainability (48%)	Research & Development (35%)	Health & Safety (26%)

ACCREDITED PROGRAMS

Employers and post-secondary representatives agree that colleges and university courses prepare students with the technical skills required for environmental work.

Over 30 academic programs are accredited by ECO Canada. These programs have proven their curriculum aligns with industry standards and the core competencies required to work in the environmental sector.

Learn more about program accreditation at eco.ca/accreditation

Overcoming Barriers To Training

HOW CAN WE BREAK DOWN THESE BARRIERS AND MAKE TRAINING AVAILABLE TO ALL?

52% OF RESPONDENTS STATED THEY FACE BARRIERS TO TRAINING.

Most Common Barriers

Respondents reported facing barriers to accessing training. 52% of respondents have experienced having faced barriers, and 48% have not.

Of the 52% who have experienced barriers, the most common are listed below.



60% can't personally afford the cost of training



57% of women experienced barriers vs 47% of men



41% can't find a training program for the skills they need



35% report no training opportunities in their location

Removing Barriers to Training

Employers report many of the same barriers to training, while participants of the study identified that a mix of 'face-to-face' and online training is ideal.

What's the solution?

- Online training is available to help employees develop the soft skills that they need to succeed in their careers
- Mentorship and in-house training can help employees develop their skill sets
- Custom training options can be designed to meet the needs of the company and the employees

Learnings for Employers

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH RESULTS IN STRONGER SUCCESS METRICS

Skill-building and employee development can help your team excel and has the added benefits of encouraging employee retention, minimizing project inefficiencies, improving service delivery, increasing the scale of your business and getting the most of your team.

Role of the employer

With almost a quarter of the workforce retiring in the next decade, investing in your team can ease their transition and prepare them to take on more senior roles.

Below are just some of the benefits of supporting essential skill development for your team:

- You can create well-rounded employees who are an asset to your organization.
- You'll notice improved communication, delegation, and collaboration when you empower your team to develop these skills.
- Don't avoid succession planning - many employers think of junior staff as higher-risk to onboard. By investing in your team, you're investing in employee retention and organizational knowledge.
- Supporting soft skill development can take an employee who specializes in technical data, and turn them into a report-writing superstar who can communicate complex info using clear language.
- Leverage your team's strengths and create opportunities for employees to demonstrate their skills e.g. ask them to give a presentation, write a business plan or proposal, lead a committee or task force, manage a scalable project, give them a client-facing role.

Create a Learning Path

Your business need employees with a well-rounded set of skills to achieve effective and efficient work. So how can you achieve this?

- Provide "on the job" training: this could be a formal training plan, bringing experts in-house to train your team, or offering mentorship or job shadowing.
- Define which skills are important within the organization and procure or create training to support them.
- Standardize training across locations and offices: if you've implemented a new technology or a new process, ensuring that everyone is trained will increase productivity.
- Incorporate training into performance evaluation process. Plan out a training pathway for your team and review it periodically to check your team's progress towards goals.
- Support employee's desire to learn new skills. Employers tell us they want their teams to succeed, but many don't support paying for training. A well-rounded employee is a benefit to your company.
- Be open to new ideas and opportunities, don't let generational differences deter employees from participating in business growth. If an employee comes to you with a great idea, try to act on it. Many businesses fail to retain good staff because they just didn't listen.

Learning For Individuals

Technical skills can land you a job, but honing your skills can help you advance and set you apart.

Here are some action items that you can implement to make your career journey successful.

ROLE OF THE EMPLOYEE

1. Be accountable for your success. This means owning both your accomplishments and failures. Try to view each outcome as an opportunity for professional growth.
2. Take ownership of your professional development. If you have identified an area for training that you would excel in, or see as a benefit to your company, advocate for yourself to get training. Employers are usually supportive if you present a strong case and prove how your learning will benefit the organization.
3. Seek out opportunities to gain new and/or improve your soft skills. Does your job involve project management? Technical writing? Delivering presentations? Look for opportunities to learn or build upon your skills in these areas. Skills like these are essential, transferable, and will help you stand out as a strong performer.
4. Offer solutions - if you see a path ahead, don't be afraid to speak up. A solutions-based approach will make you an asset to your employer. Share your insights or pitch a new idea when appropriate.
5. As you gain experience, encourage junior professionals to gain career-building skills and knowledge. Sharing your experiences through mentoring or informal coaching can make a difference and help position you as the go-to expert.
6. Use your company's feedback or performance review process to carve out a learning path. Keeping track of your goals year-round will help you showcase the expertise you've gained when it comes to formalizing your evaluation.
7. Research what it takes to succeed in your industry - do you need a professional designation to move to the next level? Do you need to obtain an additional qualification? These are conversations that your senior leadership or mentor can help you address.
8. Visualize your career progression. Are you content in your current role? Do you want to specialize in an area? Would you like to branch out and become a generalist? Don't let yourself become pigeonholed! This is a worthwhile exercise at any stage of your career. Map it out, but leave room for your path to shift with new opportunities.
9. Invest in yourself. In some cases, your employer may not be able to offer you training. Don't let this hinder your career - there are lots of free or low-cost resources available. If you face barriers to training, think of gaining training as a long-term investment. If you put in the time and money now, it can have a long-term payoff as your career soars to new heights.

Solutions For Success

1

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Increase your skills and knowledge by taking a training course such as:

- [Project Management Basics](#)
- [Professional Communications](#)
- [Technical Writing](#)
- [Navigating Canadian Environmental Law](#)
- [Fundamentals of Environmental Consulting](#)

In addition, webinars, audiobooks and podcasts are a great way to brush up on technical knowledge.

2

CUSTOM IN-PERSON TRAINING

Industry insiders told us that they prefer a blend of training options. Face-to-face training was named a preferred method.

Custom training can be a great solution for companies where training is not available in their location, or who want to train multiple employees at once.

Consider bringing an expert to your office to train your team and get them the skills the need for the job. ECO Canada offers [custom training](#) across the country, delivered by one of our expert licenced trainers.

3

MENTORSHIP

Mentorship can be formal or informal, and is a great way to share your knowledge and help build skills among colleagues or peers.

If your workplace doesn't have a mentorship program, many professional memberships offer mentoring as a way to achieve career growth and gain professional development credit. Our own [Mentorship Program for Environmental Professionals \(EP\)](#) uses a 1:1 method matching senior experts with junior proteges.

4

NETWORKING

Building a professional network can help you long-term in your career, but networking is about more than getting a job. The contacts you make in the industry can be sources of information, future partnerships, or potential coworkers.

Networking is a crucial piece of career development and a way to establish your personal brand and position yourself as an expert. Try attending a [networking event in your area](#) or joining an industry organization.

5

AUTHORSHIP

Building your own brand can help elevate your status within the industry, and one way to achieve this is through authorship.

Seek out opportunities to position yourself as a thought leader on a subject you are passionate about. You could write a blog, present a webinar or podcast, or give a speech or presentation to industry peers.

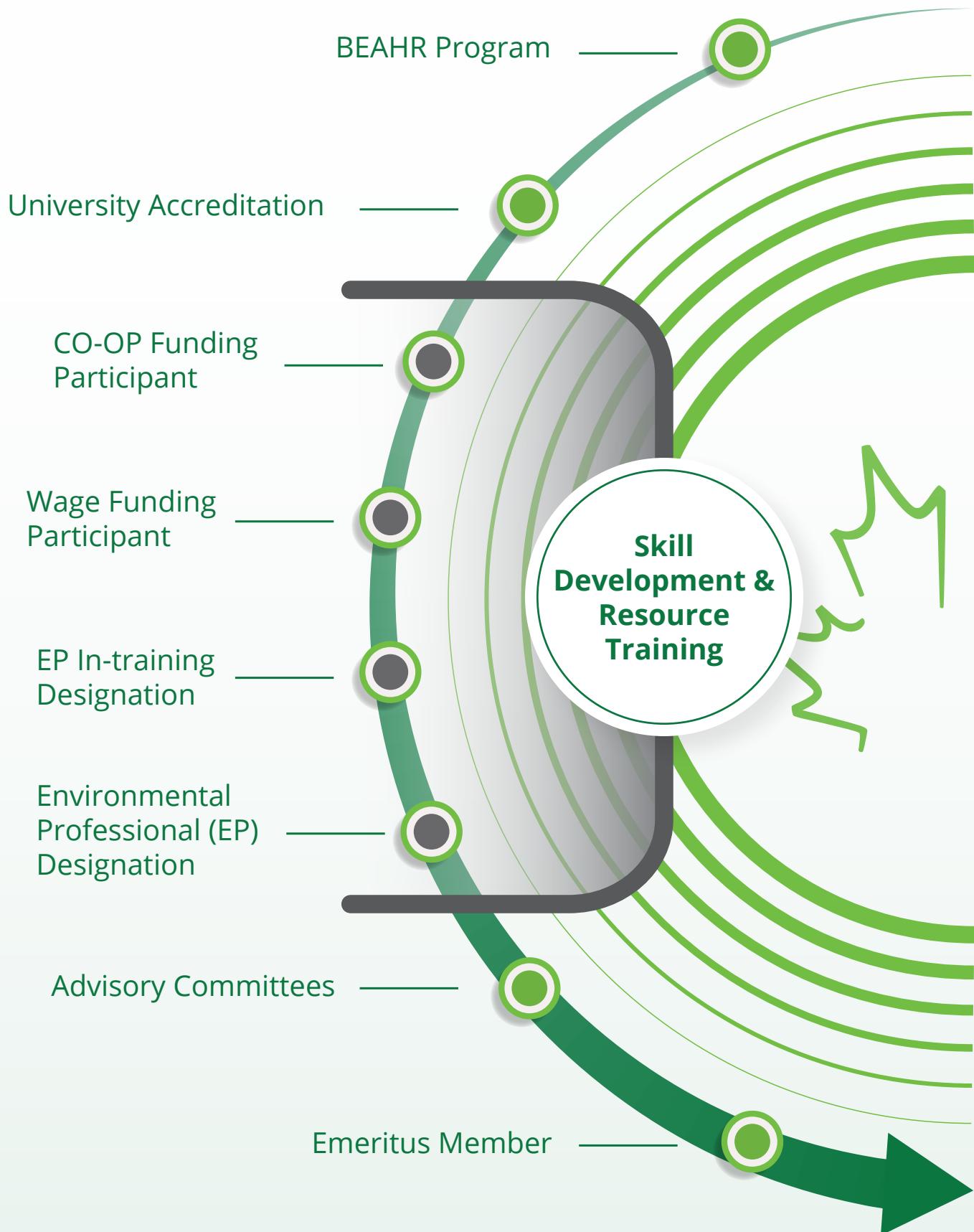
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CONTINUING EDUCATION

If you're a member of a professional organization, you will likely need to maintain a certain number of hours of training per year. Beyond your PD credit, seek out ways to continue learning within the industry.

If you have a diploma, you may consider upgrading to a degree. If you hold a bachelor's, you may want to find an environmental master's program. Many programs are now available online, such as [through our partners](#) at Royal Roads University.

An Environmental Professional Career Path



About ECO Canada



The Environmental Careers Organization of Canada (ECO Canada) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating programs and services that benefit the Canadian environmental sector.

We work with academic institutions, Indigenous communities, government and industry to build the world's leading environmental workforce.

Core Values

Independence: We maintain independence in all areas of activity from funding to the development of policy positions.

Service & Quality: We strive to provide value to industry, employers and the workforce by ensuring high quality products and services.

Responsibility: The collective interest of our members is paramount over the individual needs of any particular member. By reflecting the collective interests of our members and stakeholders in our policy positions and initiatives, we will achieve the broader needs of society.

Sustainability: The need to consider not only the protection of the environment, but also human health and quality of life of individuals and communities achieved through prosperity and an equitable participation of all, is a principle that underlie all our activities.



ECO.CA

THANKS TO OUR EXPERTS

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