

Climate change is still with us

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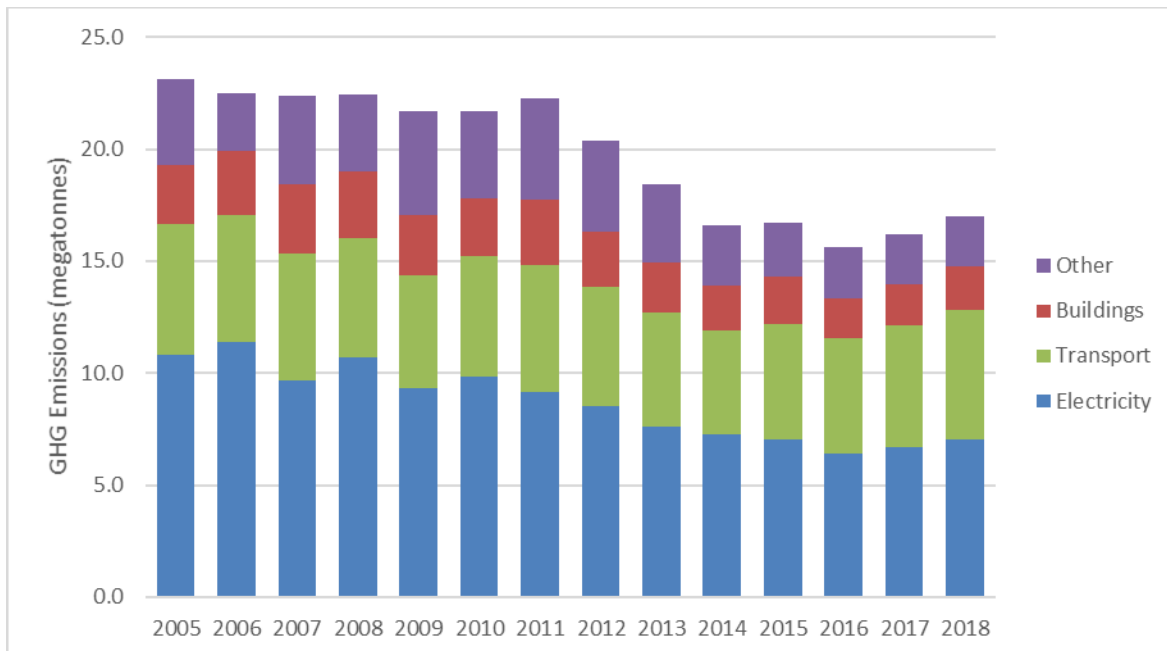
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Every year in late spring, Environment and Climate Change Canada releases the National Inventory Report, a summary of provincial and territorial greenhouse gas emissions for selected years between 1990 and two years prior to the report's release date.

The last time the NIR made the news in Nova Scotia was in 2016, when it showed that the province had (almost) reached the federal government's Paris Agreement pledge of reducing emissions by 30% from 2005 levels by 2030. At the time, the province attempted to use the data as leverage for exemption from any federal carbon-pricing system.

This year, like most others, the release of the NIR didn't make much of a splash. But perhaps it should have because the data indicates that between 2016 and 2018, the province's emissions rose by nearly one-and-a-half megatonnes and were almost as high as they were in 2013.



This increase means that Nova Scotia is no longer a member of the 30% Reduction Club (New Brunswick is the only province with that distinction), having increased from 32.5% below the 2005 level in 2016 to 26.4% below in 2018.

Despite this, emissions from two of the province's three major emitters, electricity and buildings, are still well below their 2005 levels, having declined 35% and 26%, respectively. However, in transport, the province's second largest source of emissions, the decline was less than 1%.

At first this might seem counterintuitive given that the number of light-duty gasoline vehicles (i.e., cars) in the province peaked between 2010 and 2012, and that the average fuel

consumption per vehicle has improved, resulting in a decline in emissions. Total emissions from heavy-duty diesel vehicles also declined, a possible reflection of weakening in the province's manufacturing sector.

However, between 2005 and 2018 the almost half-a-megatonne rise in emissions from the increasing number of light trucks on the province's roads more than offset the decline in emissions from cars and heavy-duty diesel vehicles.

The province is in the final few years of its plan to reduce electricity emissions. When Muskrat Falls eventually comes on-line, Nova Scotia's emissions are expected to fall well below the 30% target. What the province plans to do after 2030 is another issue entirely.

Emissions associated with the heating of buildings can be expected to fall as more low energy-demand buildings are constructed and heat pumps become the heating system of choice for new and existing buildings.

The challenge facing all governments around the world, not only those in Nova Scotia, will be how to restructure the transportation sector so that emissions decline. Any restructuring will be a balancing act, ensuring the energy security of those adopting the low-emission transportation system and maintaining it for those unable to make the transition.

When the provincial legislature eventually resumes sitting, it is understandable that issues such as preparation for a possible second wave of Covid-19 and the need for an inquiry into the Portapique mass murders will need to be addressed. The importance of these issues notwithstanding, climate change is still with us and it must be part of the legislature agenda.

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