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Great Lakes Still Under Siege from Toxic Pollution

New report shows Canadian companies in Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin produce more cancer-causing air pollution than US counterparts

Toronto, ON - Canadian companies in the Great Lakes basin reported releasing more cancer-causing pollutants to the air than companies in the United States, according to a report released today by Great Lakes-area environmental groups from both sides of the border. Per facility, Canadian facilities emitted to the air, on average, almost three times more known cancer-causing pollutants. The comparison is based on a matched dataset of 2007 data provided to the Canadian National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) and the US Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), and is outlined in *Partners in Pollution 2: An Update on the Continuing Canadian and United States Contributions to Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Ecosystem Pollution*.

In total, four million kilograms of substances considered known carcinogens were released to the air in 2007 from matched NPRI and TRI facilities in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.

“Facilities in the Great Lakes basin are major sources of pollution in the Great Lakes ecosystem, particularly cancer-causing chemicals to air,” said Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director of Canadian Environmental Law Association. “Chemical threats to the Great Lakes need the attention of our governments more than ever. Our governments must commit applying an elimination and prevention approach to persistent toxic chemicals and other toxins including cancer causing chemicals.”

According to the report, Lake Erie, which includes Lake St. Clair, St. Clair River, and Detroit River in its watershed, had the highest level of releases to air of known carcinogens. Lake Erie is the smallest and shallowest of the Great Lakes. The watersheds of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario come second and third, respectively. The majority of Canadian NPRI facilities reporting releases to air of known carcinogens are located in these two watersheds.

Releases to Air of Known Carcinogens in 2007, by Great Lakes Basin

	Number of Facilities	Erie	Huron	Lawrence	Michigan	Ontario	Superior	Total Releases to Air of Known Carcinogens
	#	kg	kg	Kg	kg	kg	kg	kg
NPRI	778	412,522	275,761	934,590	--	609,294	236,945	2,469,113
TRI	1,496	883,504	114,653	16,664	452,233	146,346	35,399	1,648,798
TOTAL for 2007	2,274	1,296,026	390,414	951,254	452,233	755,640	272,343	4,117,910

Note: Canada and U.S. data only. Data include chemicals common to both NPRI and TRI lists from selected industrial and other sources. The data reflect estimates of releases of chemicals, not exposures of the public to those chemicals. The list of 67 carcinogens is based on the California Proposition 65 List (see <http://www.oehha.ca.gov/prop65.html>).

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The report has been released to coincide with the renegotiation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, a landmark agreement between Canada and the United States to address threats to the quality of the Great Lakes. First signed in 1972 by the US and Canadian governments to address non-point sources of pollution from nutrients and phosphorus loadings, the Agreement was later revised in 1978 and amended in 1987. Through these revisions, the Agreement shifted its emphasis to focus on the virtual elimination of persistent toxic chemicals. It was instrumental in saving Lake Erie from excessive algal growth, achieving reductions of persistent toxic chemicals such as lead, mercury and PCBs, and it initiated cleanup of contaminated sediments and areas of concern. However, in the 23 years since its last renegotiation, government commitments to its principles have waned as funding for cleanup has been cut and hundreds of new chemicals have emerged on the market and are now being detected in the Great Lakes ecosystem.

"Clearly, the goals of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement have not been fully achieved," said Mike Layton, Deputy Outreach Director, Environmental Defence. "With the number of chemicals in market growing every year and new chemicals being detected in the waters, air and land of the Great Lakes, governments and facilities cannot keep pace by simply applying end-of-pipe technology or upgrading wastewater treatment plants. A greater emphasis on prevention of use of these chemicals is absolutely necessary."

The report provides a small snapshot of the pollution entering the Great Lakes. It examined only matched data between the NPRI and TRI. This encompasses 204 of 605 pollutants, and only in overlapping sectors. For example, mining and sewage treatment plants are not included. Meanwhile, only the largest facilities report. Medium and small sized plants – whose cumulative discharges are greater than the largest facilities combined – do not have to report to the NPRI and TRI.

"This report analyses 285 million kilograms of pollutants reported to NPRI and TRI. While this data is shocking enough, it represents less than 10 per cent of the pollutants discharged to the Great Lakes each year," said John Jackson, Director of Clean Production and Toxics with Great Lakes United. "We must expand the NPRI and TRI so that we can get a more complete understanding of the toxics that endanger the Great Lakes."

Other key findings from the report include:

- 285 million kg of pollutants were released and transferred (excluding recycling) from NPRI and TRI facilities in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin in 2007.
- Approximately 75 million kg of pollutants were released into the air from matched NPRI and TRI facilities.
- About 5 million kg of pollutants under Canada's NPRI and US TRI were released to water. However, this is a large underestimate of the pollutants released to water because wastewater treatment plants do not report to TRI and, therefore, are not included in the matched dataset. On a per facility basis, TRI facilities released to water over twice as much as NPRI facilities.

Environmental groups working to protect and restore the Great Lakes basin ecosystem are recommending that governments in Canada and the US:

- quantify and report annually the pollution loading to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin;
- develop and implement a binational strategy for elimination and reductions of persistent toxic chemicals and other chemicals of concern such as, but not limited to, carcinogens, reproductive and developmental toxicants, endocrine disruptors, principally through a strengthened Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement;
- expand and strengthen Canada's NPRI and US TRI programs; and,
- expand and strengthen the role of the International Joint Commission (IJC) for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River protection

Partners in Pollution 2 is available to download for free on the PollutionWatch web site (www.PollutionWatch.org).

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About PollutionWatch (www.PollutionWatch.org): PollutionWatch is a collaborative project of Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association. The web site tracks releases and transfers of pollutants across Canada based on data collected by Environment Canada through the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) and emissions of greenhouse gases based on the federal government's mandatory Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting Program. NPRI and the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting Program do not include data from all pollutants or sources.

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