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Environmental NEWS RELEASE



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EPA, ENVIRONMENT CANADA: PERSISTENT POLLUTANTS IN GREAT LAKES ARE DOWN

CHICAGO (Mar. 21, 2003) — U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada announced today that levels of the most critical, persistent pollutants around the Great Lakes – including mercury, dioxin, benzo(a)pyrene, and hexachlorobenzene – continued to go down in 2002. According to the agencies' 2002 Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy Progress Report, these reductions are part of a downward trend in toxic substances in the Great Lakes over the last 15 years.

Since 1988, mercury emissions in Ontario have gone down 78 percent. On the U.S. side, mercury releases have been reduced by 40 percent since 1990. There was a similar substantial reduction in dioxin releases on both sides of the border since the late 1980s, 92 percent in the United States and 79 percent in Canada. Since 1990, hexachlorobenzene emissions went down 75 percent in the United States and 65 percent in Canada and benzo(a)pyrene went down 48 percent in Canada and 25 percent in the United States.

Success in reducing these pollutants has been due to a combination of stronger regulations and voluntary actions. Some of the voluntary projects undertaken in 2002 were:

- Industry phase-out of the use of PCBs. Participating companies included Algoma Steel in Canada and Ford Motor Co. in the United States;
- The "Burn-it-Smart!" campaign in Ontario which promotes cleaner wood-burning technologies, helping to reduce emissions of benzo (a) pyrene; and

- more -

- The Burn Barrel and Household Garbage campaign which educates the public that burning garbage is a source of dioxin and promotes clean alternatives to this common practice.

“The ultimate goal of the Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy remains the virtual elimination of persistent toxic substances into the Great Lakes basin and I am pleased at the tremendous progress made so far,” said John Mills, regional director general of Environment Canada’s Ontario Region. “Attention now turns to the next five years and the additional progress we can make toward virtual elimination.”

“The focus of this strategy is on pollution prevention and voluntary efforts,” said U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Manager and Regional Administrator Thomas Skinner. “The key to success is working in partnership with industry and improving public awareness. We need more innovative programs that offer incentives for those who emphasize pollution reduction.”

The Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy is an agreement between Canada and the United States to reduce or eliminate persistent, bioaccumulative toxic substances from the the Great Lakes basin. Environment Canada, EPA, tribes, First Nations and other government, public and private partners work together toward that goal. 2002 marks the halfway point in the 10-year timeline of the strategy, which was established in 1997.

Level 1, or priority, substances identified by the strategy are mercury, PCBs, dioxins/furans, hexachlorobenzene, benzo(a)pyrene, octachlorostyrene, alkyl lead, aldrin, dieldrin, mirex, chlordane, toxaphene and DDT.

The report is available on www.binational.net.

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