

Date: Jun 20, 2003

Canadian polluters increased chemical releases by 20% from 1995 to 2001



Updated environmental website puts analyzed federal data at your fingertips

Pollution of Canada's air, water and land is on an upward trend that has seen it increase by more than 20% since 1995, according to an updated environmental website launched today.

Total releases of chemicals of concern increased by more than 36 million kilograms (kg) from 177,009,091 kg in 1995 to 213,414,272 kg in 2001, according to the PollutionWatch website (www.pollutionwatch.org). This increase was recorded for a group of 163 "core chemicals" that have been monitored by Environment Canada each year since 1995 through the National Pollutant Release Inventory.

Visitors to the PollutionWatch website can identify polluters in their home towns by searching by postal code, access "quick lists" of the largest polluters in the country, get pollution trends 1995-2001, or create their own ranked lists of polluters by province, municipality, industrial sector, or corporation.

"There's been a lot of smug high-fiving lately between government and industry pretending that they have a grip on pollution. But the fact is that where it matters most, in communities right across Canada, pollution is getting worse. It's going to take more than wishful thinking to clean up our land, air and water," said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director of Environmental Defence Canada.

Contaminants emitted to the atmosphere and on land each increased by 9% from 1995 to 2001. Contaminants discharged to waterways increased 37%, the website reported.

PollutionWatch shows the biggest polluters in the country include:

Air polluter. The largest air polluter in Canada is the Ontario Government's Nanticoke coal-fired electricity generating station. The Nanticoke power plant on the shores of Lake Erie released 6,934,136 kg of contaminants to the air, mostly lung-irritating, acid rain-causing gases. Nanticoke released nearly 6.3 million kg of hydrochloric acid; 389,088 kg of hydrogen fluoride, an acid rain-causing, irritating gas declared hazardous

by the US EPA; 355,421 kg of sulphuric acid, and 226 kg of the nerve toxin mercury.

Water polluter. The largest water polluter in Canada is the City of Calgary's Bonnybrook Wastewater Treatment Plant. It discharged 7.6 million kg of contaminants of concern in the treated sewage it releases into the Bow River. The plant's discharges included 7.5 million kg of nitrate which reduces the ability of blood to carry oxygen; and 107,200 kg of ammonia, a substance that has been declared toxic by the Canadian government.

Cancer polluter. The largest emitter of cancer-causing substances to the Canadian environment was the Safety-Kleen (now Clean Harbor Canada) hazardous waste landfill and incinerator in Corunna, Ontario. The hazardous waste facility near Sarnia, Ontario released 952,570 kg of carcinogens, including 774,569 kg of lead (which is also a nerve toxin), nearly all to an on-site landfill; and 73,120 kg of nickel, a cancer-causing substance, most to landfill.

Birth defects polluter. The Safety-Kleen (now Clean Harbor Canada) hazardous waste landfill and incinerator in Corunna, Ontario released 857,584 kg of chemicals that can interfere with human reproductive outcomes and child development. Safety-Kleen released 774,569 kg of lead, which can impair a child's development and intelligence; 66,703 kg of cadmium which at high exposure levels can cause low body weight, smaller testes and developmental problems in newborn and developing young animals; 15,100 kg of arsenic which has been observed to cause birth defects in animals (and can cause lung, skin, bladder, liver, kidney and prostate cancer); and 1,160 kg of the nerve toxin mercury (which slows development and reduces intelligence) – most to its landfill and 240 kg to the air.

Ozone-depleting polluter. OC Celfortec's plastic foam products facility in Grande-Ile, Quebec, was the largest emitter of substances that destroy the planet's protective ozone layer. The plant emitted 415,120 kg of ozone-depleting substances, including 304,870 kg of HCFC-142b and 110,250 kg of HCFC-22.

Toxics polluter. Alcan's Usine Vaudreuil bauxite refining operation in Jonquière, Quebec, was the largest discharger of chemicals designated as toxic by Environment Canada under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). Usine Vaudreuil released 10,163,062 kg of toxics in 2001, including more than 10 million kg of calcium fluoride to an on-site landfill. Calcium fluoride can irritate lungs and can cause bone changes called skeletal fluorosis. The plant also released 3,236 kg of cancer-causing benzo(a)pyrene to landfill.

"I take little comfort when I hear that dangerous chemicals are being buried in landfills. Sooner or later landfills leak, and people and the environment are exposed to contaminants," said Paul Muldoon, Executive Director of the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

"The large increase in pollution shows that practices need to change. The real solution to pollution is to substitute materials and change processes to stop creating these harmful substances in the first place," Mr. Muldoon said.

He added that the federal and provincial governments should:

-Prohibit new pollutants from being emitted and phase-out the most serious toxic substances by regulation, and

-Set a mandatory 50% reduction requirement for emitters of CEPA toxic substances by 2005.

The PollutionWatch website also reported that:

· In the Prime Minister's constituency, Alcan operates the nation's third-largest CEPA toxics pollution source, Usine Shawinigan, which produces aluminum cables. Usine Shawinigan released 1,916,404 kg of calcium fluoride, most to an off-site landfill; 65,142 kg of hydrogen fluoride to air, and 4,929 kg of cancer-causing benzo(a)pyrene – most to the air.

· Provincially owned Ontario Power Generation (OPG) is by far the nation's largest

corporate air polluter. The utility emitted 10.3 million kg of toxic, and smog- and acid rain-causing air pollutants, more than twice as much as the next largest air polluter. Most of OPG's air pollution came from its five coal-fired power plants.

· The country's 15 largest water polluters were all municipal sewage treatment plants.

The data on PollutionWatch is based on 2001 information collected by Environment Canada.

PollutionWatch (www.pollutionwatch.org) also includes regulatory information on toxic substances, chemical and health information, educational tool kits, maps and the ability to contact facilities or the federal Minister of the Environment.

"This website puts pollution information in the hands of people who are affected by it. PollutionWatch allows people to take immediate action by contacting polluting plants or the federal Environment Minister to voice concerns about the level of pollution in their community," said Anne Mitchell, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy.

PollutionWatch is a project of Environmental Defence Canada, the Canadian Environmental Law Association and the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy.

The following spokespeople are available for interviews:

Dr. Rick Smith, Environmental Defence Canada
Paul Muldoon, Canadian Environmental Law Association
Anne Mitchell, Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy

To arrange for an interview or for further information, contact:

Don Huff - 416-972-7404

The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.