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Lake Michigan Pollution Damage Being Stemmed

CHICAGO (AP) — Environmentalists have reported that although many problems still lie ahead, some substantial progress has been made in stemming pollution damage to Lake Michigan.

The assessment was made Friday at a day-long discussion of the efforts being made to save the lake from severe pollution damage. The event was sponsored by the Lake Michigan Federation, a five-year-old private group formed to promote the lake's environmental health.

Vaidas V. Adamkus, deputy regional administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said that "the current status of phosphorus control in Lake Michigan is encouraging."

Heavy doses of phosphorus, coming from municipal and industrial sewage and from farm runoff, has been one of the main pollutants in the lake. An oversupply of phosphorus can choke a lake because it encourages the rapid growth of algae.

Adamkus noted that while removal of phosphorus is lagging behind the schedule set up several years ago, this is partly because the severity of the problem was not then clearly recognized.

"As a result of improved sampling programs," he said, "current estimates of phosphorus loadings indicate that the cleanup job ahead of us is much greater than originally seen."

Adamkus nevertheless reported with satisfaction that by the end of last year 63 per cent of the sewage dumped into the lake was treated for phosphorus content, and that by the end of this year the figure will be 75 per cent. The goal originally had been 80 per cent by the end of 1972.

However, Adamkus said, this treatment does nothing to control the runoff of huge amounts of phosphorus applied to farm fields as fertilizer. He said three major studies now under way are attempting to find out how best to control this runoff.

"In the past five years we have come a long way," Adamkus said. "I'm not saying we should be satisfied with things they way they are, but rather we should be encouraged by our progress and spurred on by our setbacks..."

Other participants warned of additional serious problems, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a substance which is as poisonous as DDT and mercury. PCB is used in plastics manufacturing and other industries.

Dr. Robert Reinert of the Great Lakes Fishery Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich., said studies have shown very little, if any, decrease in the PCB levels found in fish in the last few years, despite an attempt to voluntarily control the escape of PCBs from industries into the lake.

Others warned that dredging operations along the lake's rim, usually associated with navigation projects, should be a more serious source of concern. //

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