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Progress reported in lakes cleanup

DETROIT (AP) — Top American and Canadian researchers see signs of hope that the contamination problems facing the Great Lakes will be under control by 1979.

The experts met last week at a conference involving a review of the pact to clean up the Great Lakes signed by Canada and the United States in 1972.

The session, held in nearby Windsor, Ont., was conducted by the International Joint Commission (IJC), which handles problems involving the boundary waters between the two countries.

When the pact was signed three years ago, the goal was to get the cleanup job done by the end of 1975.

Canadians estimate they will have 90 percent of their work done, but the U.S. side is lagging behind, estimating that the work will be finished by 1979.

Lack of money and administrative red tape were cited as reasons for the holdup.

But IJC officials say the money — some $18 billion being provided nationwide — is now available for projects such as the one to improve Detroit's massive sewage treatment works that serve more than three million people in the metropolitan area.

"It takes two things--money and desire, and we have both now," said Henry Smith III, head of the American delegation on the IJC.

At present, only a third of the 900 million gallons of waste water discharged into the Detroit River is receiving treatment.

But officials say that figure will be boosted to 50 per cent by the end of the year.

Some improvements in the condition of the Great Lakes already are evident.

Ralph Purdy, Michigan's top environment control official, said Detroit has made major progress in controlling phosphorous, which caused the growth of smelly clumps of algae in Lake Erie.

A few years ago, gooey oil deposits streaked the surface of many industrial sites along the Great Lakes.

Many trouble spots, however, still loom big.

At the conference in Windsor, some 99 "serious" problems were identified, ranging from the shores of Lake Superior to the waters around urban complexes.

And the cleanup job gets ever bigger as new — less obvious — problems are uncovered.

One concern centers on the discoery of PCB--the chemical compound polychorinated biphyenyl--in the flesh of fish.

Because of the discovery, the Federal Drug Administration has banned the interstate shipment of some catches of Great Lakes fish.

Experts say what is needed are massive amounts of money and the continued awareness and determination of people living around the Great Lakes to clean up the waters and keep them clean.

But they feel the right steps are being taken and, if they are continued, the future looks bright and encouraging.

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