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Group running Great Lakes cleanup says decade is needed to reach goal

By ROGER FLAHERTY
Chicago Daily News Service

Cleaning up polluted Great Lakes waters may take 10 to 15 more years and constant follow-up surveillance will be needed, according to the Canadian-American group supervising the effort.

In its annual report, the International Joint Commission said progress has been made since 1972 when the United States and Canada agreed to work together on pollution problems. But the commission observed that it could take up to 15 years for the effects of some pollutants to disappear after their discharge has been stopped.

Lake Erie continues to have the most serious problems, the commission reported, with high levels of industrial chemicals, heavy metals and phosphorus depleting the oxygen supply needed by marine life.

Lake Michigan water quality generally is good, the commission said, except for a serious problem with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), a widely used industrial chemical linked to cancer. The commission report says that PCB levels in Lake Michigan fish remain "well in excess" of federal standards.

"Early and continuing discussions on a binational level are needed to consider the consequences of strict controls on the important sales, use and disposal of PCBs," the commission said.

Monsanto Chemical Co., the manufacturer, voluntarily is limiting sales to essential uses, but the action has been termed inadequate by the Lake Michigan Federation, a pollution-watchdog group. The federation is coordinating an effort to have the manufacture and use of PCBs banned.

The report also said local pollution problems in Lake Michigan have been found at Green Bay, Milwaukee Harbor and the Indiana Harbor Slip Canal.

Lake Superior and Lake Huron were found to comply with water-quality standards, but concern was expressed over the future of Lake Ontario, which is showing signs of decreased oxygen supply in deep waters.

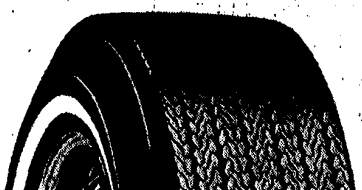
The Canadian-American commission cautioned residents of the area not to misread its time table for cleanup of the lakes, noting that many thought the goal of unpolluted lakes was to have been achieved by the end of 1975.

The parties in negotiating and signing the agreement in 1972, could not have foreseen the magnitude of the problem," the report says. "The commission now speaks of a decade or more before the goals of the agreement can be fully realized."

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