



Some Public Health Resources for the Great Lakes St Lawrence River Ecosystem

Opportunities for Public Health Contributions to public policy in 2010-2011

Renegotiation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement now underway.

This historic Agreement has guided most bi-national activity on water quality since its first iteration in 1972. In 2008 there was a review panel that conducted broad consultations on the most recent 1987 Agreement which concluded that there was wide spread concern about the functionality and scope of that agreement. Hilary Clinton and Lawrence Cannon announced in 2009 that a new Agreement would be renegotiated and that process commenced early this year.

Release of the new draft agreement and public meetings are anticipated in **April 2011**. A central consideration will be if public health protection is included in the new “modernized” Agreement. Old issues which need modernizing are toxic contamination and areas of concern, nutrient loadings, ship source pollution, habitat and biodiversity protection and science coordination. New issues under review are chemicals of emerging concern, invasive species, the near shore, climate change and most importantly governance. The Ontario Public Health Association’s Marina Whelan of Peel region as well as CELA and Great Lakes United are on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee to the Canadian Negotiators and are promoting the inclusion of human health.

Links: <http://www.cela.ca/collections/water/great-lakes-water-quality-agreement>

http://www.pollutionwatch.org/pub/Partners_in_Pollution_2_FINAL.pdf

http://www.glu.org/en/campaigns/healthy_waters/glwqa BE PART OF BASINWIDE ORGANISING AND COLLABORATIVE SUBMISSIONS join Great Lakes United

<http://www.ijc.org/en/activities/consultations/glwqa/index.php>

<http://www.ec.gc.ca/grandslacs-greatlakes/default.asp?lang=En&n=88A2FOE3-1>

http://binational.net/home_e.html OFFICIAL WEBSITE FOR THE RENEGOTIATION

Register to be kept informed. (So far there is very limited content reflecting on issue considerations, webinars already held to date and the large number of submissions made to them).

The attached article: The Importance of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, David O. Carpenter Journal of Public Health Policy (2007) a good introduction to some of the issues.

Financing is key to the success of the next Agreement

Canada has not significantly increased its allocation to the Great Lakes in over a decade. The Canada Ontario Agreement on cost sharing and delivery of Great Lakes Programs has been one place where the public has tried to strengthen programs. That Agreement has lapsed many times over the years and federal and provincial budget processes and political changes have stood in the way of regularising things on the Canadian side. We were promised a much strengthened COA in 2010 but instead the Agreement has been extended for this year and likely will be extended for next year until the new Agreement is signed. The St. Lawrence Quebec Agreement on programs for the River is also extremely important. CELA and other groups in the Green Budget Coalition struggle every year to increase Canadian funding for the ecosystem in the Federal Budget Which need to parallel the levels of funding committed by the US to restoration. Many have speculated that the lack of increased funding commitments has slowed down the negotiations. Below are links to the Green Budget Coalition and to the US Restoration efforts.

<http://greenbudget.ca/pdf/Green%20Budget%20Coalition%27s%20Preliminary%20Recommendations%20for%20Budget%202011%20%28September%202010%29.pdf>

<http://www.healthylakes.org/policy/great-lakes-restoration-initiative-policy/coalition-urges-congressional-support-of-great-lakes-restoration-initiative>

While these efforts are underway there is no lack of emergencies and current crises in the Great Lakes that need our immediate attention.

The Asian Carp threat to the Great Lakes St. Lawrence ecosystem

Join others including States and Ontario in calling for separation of the connection between the vectors between the Chicago River and the Mississippi and other entry points like the Maumee River in Ohio. It is widely accepted that a large invasion of this species could cause a crash in the health, functioning, food web and biodiversity of the ecosystem and economies dependant on them.

http://www.glc.org/restore/pdf/2010/Carp%20fact%20sheet_March%2025_FINAL.pdf

<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Newsroom/LatestNews/282766.html>

Nuclear Threats

1. Canadian energy company Bruce Power Ltd. plans to ship 16 radioactive steam generators via the St. Clair River and Lake Erie before continuing along the St. Lawrence Seaway to the Atlantic Ocean. Their final destination is Sweden where they will be decontaminated and recycled back into the marketplace. These generators are currently being stored on-site at Bruce Power's Owen Sound facility in Ontario, Canada, and are all embedded with low-level radioactive waste. Originally reassurances were given that these operations would be contained on site. The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) has extended their deadline for reviewing Bruce Power's shipment plan to November 22, 2010 and is expected to issue a decision by the end of November or mid-December. The Industry has stated that once the generators leave their site they are not responsible for their fate in the Great Lakes or in their long journey or reprocessing. JOIN THE GROWING MOVEMENT TO STOP THIS PRECEDENT.

http://www.cela.ca/sites/cela.ca/files/Resolution_re_radioactive_steam_generators_GL.pdf

CELA's submission traces the regulatory framework in place and calls for a full Assessment of this project under the CEAA. <http://www.cela.ca/publications/how-canada-regulates-nuclear-power>.

2. One of Canada's Areas of Concern Port Hope, Ontario one of the many radioactive sites lining the Great Lakes, has been the focus of recent concerns. The removal of radioactive soil, the product of years of radium and uranium refining at the Cameco refinery, from neighbourhoods and backyards has shown more volumes and higher levels of contaminated soil than anticipated. The proliferation of these legacy sites should be a public health concern for those downstream as our Province considers the impacts of future energy supply choices.

3. Potential for a much lower health protective standard for tritium in Ontario's drinking water. Raising concerns about the routine presence of Tritium near to Nuclear Power Plants in the Great Lakes, the Environmental and Occupational Working Group of the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition and Toronto's MOH called for reconsideration of our standards. Ontario's Drinking Water Advisory Council held hearings and recommended in May 2009 lowering the standard from 7,000 to 20 Becquerels per litre. However the government has delayed action on these recommendations. Your public health units could ACT NOW and write their own letters modeled on the one we have appended to urge the new Minister of the Environment to act on his Advisory Committee's recommendations which the operators of these plants say they can comply with.

Trends - Has the Tipping Point been passed? A fore shadowing of what's to come.

One of our Great Lakes is in grave trouble because scientists can no longer sort out cause and effect and recommend actions based on "sound science". In the 1980's Lake Erie was dying from lack of oxygen choked by nutrients and phosphorous primarily cause by laundry detergent. Banning phosphates from detergents brought back the Lake and has been touted as the biggest Great Lakes success story. Now the shallowest Great Lake is once again in severe trouble and the sources of that trouble are likely from a deluge of new stressors that are interacting in ways that are not easily understood. Climate warming meant less ice and more intense and earlier storms washing nutrients off the lands in record loadings last spring, new invasive species have interfered with biological interactions and the fate of pollutants old and new. Now phosphates are widely in use again this time in detergents for dish washers.

There are lessons here and changes that need to be put into practice immediately by governments. **Integrated watershed management** has become a buzz word but not put into practice yet. Ontario's source water protection regime <http://www.thewaterhole.ca/> still does not address the Great Lakes the source of drinking water for 1/3 of Canadians adequately. The Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments still work in silos and science in the public interest in the Canadian Great Lakes is a thing of the past as our federal scientists have been gagged and science at all levels of government and in academia have been under resourced. Institutions like the IJC have been challenged to come to conclusion on their own studies as seen in their study revisions of their Review of the Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River order of Approval for levels and flows and of their St. Clair River review of how that river influences the levels of the middle Lakes Michigan and Huron. A new level of cooperation, program sharing and integration and public inclusion in governance decision-making and accountability is called for in the Great Lakes.

Broad Public Health, Environmental and Labour coalitions have created other unique opportunities for change and progress. The myth that the public will panic if health impacts are discovered needs to be retired. The public seeks new tools to manage their own risk and compel their governments to act to prevent exposures.

While we are still a long way from zero discharge and virtual elimination of toxics guiding principles of the 1978 and 87 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, some small steps have

occurred toward acknowledging the benefits of regulating the reduction of toxics and our exposures in Ontario. Ironically these principles first enshrined in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement have inspired other jurisdictions to act to protect public health by chemical management regimes that require assessments and use of safer alternatives where available. The best example of this is the REACH program in the EU. The success of broad coalitions in achieving pesticide bans in Canadian municipalities and Provinces and growing consumer protection concerns are persuading governments to start to manage chemicals in improved ways. Reliance on voluntary compliance by industry has proven to be ineffective. This is demonstrated in the growing volumes and varieties of chemicals still being emitted to the Great Lakes.

Ontario's Toxics Reduction Act - Regulations key to its success are expected this year

In July 2007 a group convened by Cancer Care Ontario released a report identifying many problems with the regulation of carcinogens in Ontario. A new Environmental and Occupational Carcinogens Stakeholder Group was then created under the leadership of the Canadian Cancer Society Ontario Division to seek remedies to the sparse, weak and Inconsistent approach to carcinogens. Promises were given by all three parties prior to the election that year to act on the reports recommendations. <http://www.cela.ca/publications/cancer-and-environment-ontario> Shortly after Dalton McGuinty was re-elected he announced his intention to draft a toxic Reduction Act as a health protection measure in Ontario. CELA drafted a Model Toxic Reduction Act to make our expectations clear and the CELA worked hard with others on a Take Charge on Toxics campaign <http://takechargeontoxics.ca/> to make the Law as strong as possible. See a collection of materials on the Act on CELA's website <http://www.cela.ca/collections/justice/toxics-use-reduction-ontario>. The act was passed in 2009. While it is a beginning many things CELA sought were not included. The Economic downturn led to more business friendly priorities. The regulations that will be crucial to the success of this Law need to be in place by the Fall of 2011. The MOE has been consulting for well over a year on the first regulation which addresses the roles and responsibilities that planners will play in the required pollution prevention plans for large facilities that already report to the National Pollution Release Inventory. Our coalition has asked for worker involvement in these plans to ensure those to benefit first from pollution prevention can realise and contribute to those benefits and seek to have the plans implemented which is not a requirement of the law, A second regulation setting out penalties for failure to draft a plan. It is also expected to set out the eventual inclusion of new substances of concern, the endocrine disruptive and other emerging substances that cause neurological and developmental impacts and act in new ways on human health. Time is running out to secure these regulations prior to the next election. Watch Ontario's Environmental Registry for an opportunity to make submissions on these important regulations. http://www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ERS-WEB-External/searchNotice.do?menuIndex=1_2&searchType=splash

There is a growing support globally and in Canada for green chemistry. A Great Lakes Green Chemistry Network has been formed <http://www.glgc.org/about>. This network holds informative phone webinars with new public and environmental health and green toxic reduction experts on alternatives to toxics.

Major investments from governments and the private sector have enabled the establishment of the Green Center <http://www.greencentrecanada.com/> at Queens University in Kingston and also for other innovation at McGill in Montreal <http://www.mcgill.ca/news/2005/summer/green/> .

Municipal Community Right to Know bylaws

During the last municipal elections the Cancer Society campaigned for enhanced community right-to-know about exposures in several communities.

http://www.cancer.ca/Ontario/About%20us/Media%20centre/Our%20positions%20on%20cancer-related%20issues/Community%20Right%20to%20Know.aspx?sc_lang=en&r=1

The City of Toronto has pioneered such a by-law which is in force this year.

CELA as a member of the Occupational and Environmental Carcinogens Working Group of the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition worked to get this by-law in place. It requires not only large but also small and medium size businesses using any of the 25 problem substances in Toronto's air to report on all stages of their production processes and emissions and to make this information publically available. A copy of this bylaw can be found here.

http://www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/enviro_info.htm

Other new surveillance tools

There is a huge need to better understand and document the connections between environmental and occupational exposures to carcinogens and other health threatening contaminants. Several good sources for this information can be found at CAREX Canada.

<http://www.carexcanada.ca/>

Eric Hollowaty and his team at Cancer Care Ontario have developed a rapid GIS information system which can overlay health data on neighbourhood maps at a postal code level based on work being done at the CDC in Atlanta. His system shows much more detailed information on outcomes of exposures and can be done much more quickly than traditional surveillance. CELA and other groups have sought to get grants to use these data bases to enhance our law reform efforts. This has been difficult primarily because of public health concerns about risk communication.

The Implementation of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement signed in 2008 by Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes States expected in 2011 and 2012 .

CELA has been involved in the negotiation and implementation of this Agreement since 2000. The need for the Agreement was recognised in the Great Lakes when the Ontario government inadvertently issued a licence for bulk export of Lake Superior water to the orient. The need to protect the Great Lakes from bulk withdrawals to arid areas of the US has long been a fear of Canadians. A close examination of the issue by Great Lakes United and CELA in our 1987 report, *The Fate of the Great Lakes ~ Sustaining or Draining the Sweetwater Seas?*, showed that the local thirst of the GL Region was likely to be just as much of a threat to the ecosystem. The Agreement bans large diversions with some exceptions that will have to be approved by a bi-national Regional Body.

Over the next several years, Ontario will need to implement a water conservation plan called for in this Agreement and also face the challenge of limiting intra-basin diversions from one Great Lake to another within the Province. CELA has a collection of materials on this Agreement.

<http://www.cela.ca/collections/water/water-quantity-great-lakes-%E2%80%93-st-lawrence-river-basin-sustainable-water-resources-a>

As well the Province has also announced a new Water Opportunities Act to promote Ontario innovations in clean water and water efficiency businesses. This Act also envisions new conservation Initiatives for the whole Province.

CELA is working with a broad Coalition to strengthen this Act.

http://www.cela.ca/sites/cela.ca/files/Ontario_Water_Opportunities_and_Water_Conservation_Act_Nov_2010.pdf

To educate and engage your community about Great Lakes Issues arrange a showing of the inspirational and investigative NFB film Water Life

<http://waterlife.nfb.ca/>

You can arrange a showing in your community by contacting film maker Kevin McMahon.

kevin@primitive.net .