

**SHORELINE RESIDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES
TOWARD THE
ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS
IN AND AROUND
LAKE ONTARIO**

SEPTEMBER, 1989

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE
REPORT TO POLLUTION PROBE
PREPARED BY DECIMA RESEARCH
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A DECIMA REPORT TO POLLUTION PROBE



THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

- **Lake Ontario residents recognize the environment, particularly toxic chemicals (38%) and industrial air pollutants (48%), as the most important problem in their area. Top-of-mind concern for the environment (15%) supercedes economic issues (11%).**
- **One-in-two residents see significant health risks associated with the environmental problems in and around Lake Ontario. In fact, they link environmental problems directly with the quality of health of those who reside near the Lake.**
- **Most people (60%) fear that the health effects will increase substantially over the next five years.**
- **There is some evidence that people are neither willing to swim in the Lake or eat fish caught there because of their concerns about the quality of the Lake's environment. Put simply, they seem to be acting on their fears about the quality of environment in and around the Lake.**



- **The first priority of governments (42%) should be improving the protection of the environment.**
- **Governments' "zero discharge" commitment – the elimination of all discharges of the most dangerous chemicals into Lake Ontario – should be achieved within 10 years (90%). To residents, governments are currently moving too slowly toward fulfilling this commitment.**
- **One of the most significant findings of the study is the overwhelming support(78%) for the governments to regulate those environmental risks, even if those have not been clearly identified and demonstrated. In the context of public policy, residents want the governments to enact strong environmental laws to reduce health risks of toxic chemicals in and around Lake Ontario, even where the consequences for health are not fully understood.**
- **There is a broad understanding that improved environmental protection will be accompanied with higher living costs in the form of higher taxes and consumer prices or even less public services in other areas. 68% support higher taxes and 85% accept higher consumer prices.**



Residents of Hamilton see the environment in and around Lake Ontario being "poor or fair" condition, whereas Rochester and Oswego residents see it being in better shape.

	Quality of Environment in and around Lake Ontario		
	Poor %	Fair %	Good/Excellent %
Bay of Quinte	25	46	29
Hamilton	46	38	16
Rochester	15	43	40
Oswego	12	38	50



Toxic Chemicals is Perceived as the Greatest Environmental problem threatening the area in and around Lake Ontario.

	Greatest Environment Threat to area in and around Lake Ontario		
	Toxic Chemicals %	Sewage %	Acid Rain %
Canadian Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	38	19	9
American Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	30	11	8
Aggregate	34	15	9



Toxic Chemicals into Lake Ontario is the top health concern of residents.

	Perception of Sources of Health Risks		
	Canada (mean)	United States (mean)	Aggregate (mean)
Industrial Chemicals Toxics	8.31	7.23	7.75
Ozone Layer	7.99	7.22	7.60
Industrial Air Pollution	7.97	7.14	7.56
Chemical Seepage from landfill and storage sites	7.85	7.02	7.44
Chemical Fertilizers and Pesticides	7.15	6.62	6.88
Consumption of Lake Ontario Fish	6.55	5.41	5.89
Transport of Dangerous Goods	5.78	5.55	5.66



Residents seem to be Acting on Environmental Concerns

Perception of Environmental Quality in and around Lake Ontario	Willingness to Swim/Eat Fish Index*			
	Swim/Eat Lake Fish %	Swim/Don't Eat Fish %	Don't Swim/Eat Fish %	Neither Swim/Nor Eat Fish %
Poor	11	13	6	70
Fair	27	12	13	48
Good/Excellent	47	15	12	27

* This variable is constructed from the following questions:

- 1) Have you or anyone else in your family gone swimming in Lake Ontario during the past 12 months? 2) Would you be willing to swim in Lake Ontario? 3) Have you or has any member of your family eaten fish caught in Lake Ontario during the past 12 months? 4) Would you be willing to eat fish caught in Lake Ontario?



Lake Residents seem to be Acting on Health Concerns Linked to Environmental Problems

Perceptions of Health Risks of Environmental Problems in and around Lake Ontario	Willingness to Swim in/Eat Fish Index			
	Swim/Eat Lake Fish %	Swim/Don't Eat Fish %	Don't Swim/Eat Fish %	Neither Swim/Nor Eat Fish %
Many Health Risks	21	10	12	57
Some Health Risks	37	12	9	41
No/Very Few Health Risks	25	30	6	38



Lake Ontario Residents Believe the Number One Policy Priority for Governments Should be Protecting the Environment

	Government Should Make #1 Priority	
	Ensuring Economic Growth is Strong %	Protecting the Environment %
Canadian Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	20	49
American Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	29	35
Aggregate	19	42



About 90% believe that the "Zero Discharge" Commitment should be achieved within 10 years.

	Responsible Time for Realizing "Zero Discharge"			
	Immediately (Volunteered) %	1 to 5 Years %	Within 10 Years %	Gradually Over Time %
Canada	7	62	18	11
United States	8	62	13	14
Aggregate	7	62	15	12



Stronglaws should be enacted even if environmental risks are not clearly identified and demonstrated.

	Regulation of Unknown Environmental Risks	
	Can't Regulate Unknown Risks %	Need to Regulate Unknown Risks %
Canadian Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	13	87
American Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	28	69
Aggregate	21	78



Lake Ontario residents want tough government action against toxic chemicals that cause serious birth defects in animals.

Regulation of Toxic Chemicals causing Birth Defects in Animals				
	Immediately Ban Chemical %	Restrict Its Use %	Provide Product Warnings %	Wait To Take Action %
Men	50	29	7	12
Women	59	26	6	7
Aggregate	54	28	7	10



Seven-in-ten Lake Ontario residents support an "Environmental Tax Surcharge"

	Increased Taxes to Help Industry Reduce Pollution	
	Support %	Oppose %
Canadian Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	67	32
American Residents of Lake Ontario's Shoreline	69	28
Aggregate	68	31

