



For Immediate Release

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Toxics Bill Ignores Ontario's Biggest Reported Water Polluters

Data show sewage treatment plants are major sources of toxics

Toronto – Sewage treatment plants are the **Top 10 Water Polluters** in Ontario, and are the largest reported releasers of mercury and lead into the province's lakes, streams, and rivers, according to an analysis released today by Environmental Defence. The analysis comes as a legislative committee at Queen's Park reviews the government's proposed *Toxics Reduction Act*, and underscores the need to include sewage treatment plants in the Act and regulations.

"The *Toxics Reduction Act* will provide an important game plan to reduce toxic pollution, but it should apply to *all* polluters," said Aaron Freeman, Policy Director for Environmental Defence. "Sewage treatment plants are a source of toxic chemicals, and one of the best candidates to further pollution prevention."

The *Toxics Reduction Act*, a bill introduced by the Ontario government on April 7, 2009 and based on effective strategies used in other jurisdictions, will require industries to account for their pollution use and emissions, as well as develop pollution prevention plans. However, sewage treatment plants are not proposed to be included within the regulations.

As a portion of total reported water emissions in Ontario, sewage treatment plants are responsible for approximately 88% of mercury, 71% of lead, 37% of arsenic, and nearly all chlorine releases. Data from the PollutionWatch web site, a joint project of Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association, show that Ontario sewage treatment plants released (on-site and off-site) and transferred: 236 kg of mercury, 14.4 tonnes of lead, 1.8 tonnes of arsenic, and 242.5 tonnes of chlorine into air, land, and water in 2006. The PollutionWatch web site uses data from the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI), the federal government's national pollution reporting program. Total releases from sewage plants may in fact be much higher, since not all substances meet the NPRI reporting thresholds (10,000 kg of a particular substance used in the facility).

Metals such as mercury and lead are especially concerning, given their effects on reproduction and development. Mercury contamination is also a leading cause of fish advisories in the Great Lakes.

Environmental Defence recommends the *Toxics Reduction Act* and regulations apply to sewage treatment plants. This would encourage municipalities and other owners and operators to set stricter pollution limits for industries and others discharging toxics into sewers leading to the sewage treatment plant.

Environmental Defence also recommends that reporting thresholds for all industrial facilities be included in the proposed *Toxics Reduction Act* be lowered significantly. Toronto, for example, recently passed a bylaw to stimulate pollution prevention planning and reduce toxics discharges from small- and medium-sized businesses. Such businesses account for the majority of toxic substance releases in urban areas. In contrast to the reporting thresholds in the proposed Act (10,000 kg and 10 or more employees), this Toronto bylaw has no employee threshold and facilities must report if they emit 100 kg of given toxics.

"Applying the Act to sewage treatment plants would reduce releases of the many toxic chemicals these plants spew into our waterways," said Freeman.

About Environmental Defence (www.environmentaldefence.ca): Environmental Defence protects the environment and human health. We research solutions. We educate. We go to court when we have to. All in order to ensure clean air, clean water and thriving ecosystems nationwide, and to bring a halt to Canada's contribution to climate change.

About PollutionWatch (www.PollutionWatch.org): is a collaborative project of Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association. The web site tracks releases and transfers of pollutants across Canada based on data collected by Environment Canada through the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI). The NPRI does not include data from all pollutants or sources.

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