

EPA and Canada



The United States and Canada share a 5,100-mile border across which air and water pollution flow. Both countries are concerned with control of this pollution, as well as with protection of shared natural resources, such as the Great Lakes. EPA is deeply involved in negotiations between the two countries on transboundary pollution problems, and plays a major role in implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which the United States and Canada signed in 1972 and renewed in 1978. In addition, the extensive trade relations between the two countries require cooperation to minimize potential hazards in the international movement of toxic chemicals.

A major forum for resolving transboundary pollution problems is the International Joint Commission, established by the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. Through the IJC—made up of three United States and three Canadian representatives—the two countries are developing solutions to such problems as pollution of U.S. air and water by Canadian power development projects, and threatened pollution of Canadian waters by the proposed Garrison Diversion Project in North Dakota. EPA plays an advisory role in formulating IJC-recommended solutions to these problems.

An important IJC concern is pollution of the Great Lakes, which contain 20 percent of the world's fresh water supply. Phosphorus introduced into the lakes has caused excessive organic growth, resulting in eutrofication. Drinking water supplies, fisheries, and other uses of Lake waters have been threatened by such toxic substances as pesticides, heavy metals, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The two nations, with extensive technical assistance from EPA, are trying to reverse the deterioration of the Lakes. The quality of Great Lakes waters is gradually being restored, although serious problems remain, particularly in Lakes Ontario and Erie.

EPA is represented on the U.S. Canadian Consultative Group on Long Range Transport of Air Pollutants. This group was formed in 1978 to coordinate research on this issue. A particular concern is acid rain, which is seriously threatening forests and lakes in Ontario Province and the northeastern United States. The primary cause of acid rain is burning of sulfurous fuels, such as coal.

EPA is actively engaged in Congressionally-mandated negotiations with Canada seeking an air pollution agreement under which transboundary air pollution problems

can be resolved. These negotiations were initiated in December, 1978.

Some of the other areas in which EPA and Canada are working together include:

- Cooperation on the regulation of toxic chemicals, and harmonization of criteria, testing and evaluation procedures.
- Development of compatible regulations for toxic and hazardous waste disposal.
- Development of joint contingency plans to clean up oil spills in the Great Lakes and coastal waters.
- Regular exchanges of research data concerning air and water pollution.
- Cooperation and consultation on positions taken in international forums.

