

Statements by Ministers

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We are not going to take that. We have had enough of you, Ray.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Stewart: Oh, Johnny.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We won't take any of this nonsense.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Rossi: One language Stewart.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Bourassa (Mr. Rossi), order. The Hon. Minister may resume his statement but I caution him that a point of order which I have ruled out of order should not be continued or commented on.

Mr. McMillan: Mr. Speaker, although the scientific investigation is not yet complete—

Mr. Keeper: Arrogant.

Mr. McMillan:—I would like to make a preliminary report on the situation in the St. Clair River based on the most up-to-date information as of 3.10 this afternoon. It should reassure both the Canadian public and Members of the House that the federal Department of the Environment is moving, in co-operation with the Opposition and the Government of Ontario, on all fronts to remove and identify the source of the tarry substance that is disfiguring the river and causing concern about the quality of the drinking water of thousands of Canadians.

I should explain that this statement is an interim one only, because the situation has proved to be more complex than the investigative team originally thought. Moreover, ongoing clean-up of the river has been complicated by bad weather. Since the House will not be meeting until after the New Year, as of tomorrow, I thought that nevertheless it would be useful to report on the findings to date.

To put the matter into context, let me briefly review the sequence of events in the St. Clair River. Certain tarry substances have been noted in the river since the mid-1970s. Continuous sampling has taken place, but it was not until two years ago that more sophisticated analytical methods were developed for this type of natural phenomenon. In 1984, the Great Lakes Institute, acting on behalf of both the federal Department of the Environment and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, conducted a survey to identify "hot spots" in the St. Clair River. In August, 1984, a sample of the tarry substance was submitted to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment for analysis. In mid-August of this year, the tests were completed and, based on the results, additional sampling was authorized.

Between August 13 and August 16 of this Year, Dow Chemical situated on the river, spilled perchloroethylene, of which all but 2,500 gallons was recaptured. My first act, after

my appointment as Minister of the Environment on August 19, was to instruct department officials to offer full scientific and technical advice to their Ontario colleagues in order to clean up the remainder of the spill.

By November 1, information from officials of the Department of the Environment made it clear to me that the problem was much more complex and potentially more serious than just the spill itself. That same day I set up a team of scientists whose only task since then has been to identify all the components of the so-called blob and to identify other pollution problems in the St. Clair River, locate their origins and begin working on solutions to them. That analytical team, I might say, includes Canada's most distinguished scientists in every relevant field—organic chemistry, hydro-dynamics, hydrogeology, pollution engineering, diving and underwater photography to mention just a few. There are more than 50 scientists in all working literally seven days a week on the St. Clair River problem. Moreover, because our American neighbours have a direct stake in the purity of the St. Clair River, I have kept Lee Thomas, Director of the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States, fully informed, and his scientists are giving my Department their complete co-operation.

In that first week of November, the *CSS Advent*, Environment Canada's scientific research vessel, was dispatched to the St. Clair River. Underwater photography gave us the first clear picture of the extent of the pollution there. Divers immediately began collecting samples from the riverbed and these have now been analysed in the laboratories of the National Water Research Institute. The scientific team has completed more than 2,000 analyses for a full range of organic pollutants.

On the basis of those analyses, the scientific team, established on November 1, is now integrating and interpreting data in order to provide a complete and coherent picture of the St. Clair River. By January 20, I expect to have their report and be able to release it to the House, and through the House, to the Canadian public.

On the basis of the work done to date, we do know that the so-called blob comprises extremely high concentrations of perchloroethylene and carbon tetrachloride. The two chemicals are used as dry-cleaning solvents and, in fact, it is the very properties that render them useful in dry-cleaning that make them obnoxious in drinking water. In this case, they have absorbed other contaminants throughout the St. Clair River into themselves and of course compounded the magnitude of the tarry-like substance that is now being vacuumed.

Let me turn now to private sector involvement in the St. Clair problem and the context in which it exists.

First, every Member of the House, and in fact every person in the country, has to recognize that we live in a chemical society. Today there are more than 60,000 chemicals being used in the world's trade and commerce, and more than 1,000 new compounds are being introduced annually. Each year, companies in North America produce more than a ton of chemicals for each man, woman and child living on the entire continent.