

Features

Chemical waste: a neglected threat

Lydia Pawlenko

The Upper Ottawa Street Dump stands very much like a blackened volcano in a Hamilton suburb. Along the steep sides of the layers of dirt, stone, and decomposing garbage, lie long sheets of computer programming paper-pollution reports from various universities, government agencies and consulting firms...Ominous declarations that warn the trespasser who has crossed the dump's boundary of fences and small, minnowless stream.

Last July, this dump was shut down after a controversial court case in which the Ontario Ministry of Environment laid more than 100 charges of falsifying information on a return made by a now defunct Hamilton disposal firm. The Ministry, through an audit of way bills, found that K.D. Enterprises and its affiliate Interflow Systems, had disposed over 500,000 gallons of waste over a three month period. Witnesses in the court accused the company of pouring at least 150,000 gallons of chemical waste through a bottomless holding tank at Hamilton harbour, while more of the sludge was put into a second such "magic box" at the

Upper Ottawa Street landfill dump.

The Province lost the case after the judge claimed he was not convinced that a way bill was a "return" as defined by the law.

A Ministry investigation of the way bills (Ontario's new method of keeping track of waste transport and dumping) used by Interflow and K.D. Enterprises, disclosed that only 1 per cent of the Upper Ottawa Street dump's waste came from local sources, although a Hamilton bylaw prohibits the dumping of waste from outside the Hamilton Wentworth Region.

Around the dump site, children play in fields which have



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been invaded by savage flowers and tall grasses. They trudge wearily home from the roller palace situated on the edge of the dump, to their homes in the new subdivision across the street.

"We've only lived here for two months," said one woman who resides in a peaceful cluster of

townhouses just outside of the dump. "No, I never think about what's been dumped there. It's only on the odd days that I've noticed any smell. But trucks wake me up every day at about seven o'clock. There are trucks still dumping, even though it's supposed to be closed."

It is only now, after the tragedy of the notorious Love Canal just across the border in Niagara Falls, New York, that awareness has grown concerning the toxic chemicals which have been so carelessly dumped for decades.

While we enjoy the products of a technological utopia, chemical contaminants threaten us with diminished reproductive capacity, deformed offspring, loss of ability to learn, and an increased susceptibility to cancer. The situation in Ontario alone, is an alarming one.

The way bill is a series of forms introduced in Ontario in 1977, designed to keep track of the volume, composition and destination of waste being shipped. Manufacturers are required to fill out the first way bill and the agent who accepts the waste fills out the second. Both copies of the way bills are then sent to the provincial government, where the transactions are recorded.

This system, unfortunately, has proved to be inefficient and not stringently enforced. The shipper simply may not fill out a way bill in the first place.

Based on recordings made by the way bill system, it is estimated that Ontario produces an average of 60 million gallons of hauled liquid industrial waste a year. Twenty per cent of this amount is considered to be

System not stringently enforced

hazardous. Ten per cent is transported to the United States (something not accounted for in the way bill system). Thirty per

cent is taken to the Tricell incineration unit in Sarnia and the remaining sixty per cent goes into landfill sites.

1,128 waste disposal sites discovered in Southern Ontario

During the summer of 1979, York Professor Jack Ellis and a team of ten graduate student researchers identified 1,128 waste disposal sites across 38 counties and regions in southern Ontario. This "Site Identification Study" was undertaken by the Faculty of Environmental Studies on behalf of the Waste Management Branch division of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment.

The purpose of the study was to identify all sites that were used for waste disposal prior to the Environment Ministry's introduction of certification procedures for such sites. In most areas, this meant sites used prior to 1971. A survey form provided by the Ministry was designed to provide as much detail information about early waste disposal sites as there was about current certified sites.

"Some of the sites were 50 or 60 years old," Ellis said. In some municipalities, the students received no answers, but "got leads" from retired municipal clerks and council members they tracked down.

"The students contacted industries and asked what they had done with waste prior to 1971," Ellis explained. "It was hard to get any information. Very often industries used their own property or dumped into rivers."

Landfilling has historically been the cheapest way of disposing waste and was a familiar sight around the Toronto area until the Ontario government's ban on landfilling



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