

*Statements by Ministers*

I want to pay tribute to a young man who came into my constituency office late in August of this year and said to me: "This may cost me my job but it's something I think you should know about". That was the first public acknowledgement, outside of the environs of the scientific community and members of Ministries of the Environment, that a classic, absolutely catastrophic environmental problem was in front of us as a society. I want to pay tribute, and I hope the House will also, to the courage of that young man. He is not part of any of these official agencies. He knew his job could be at risk because he was prepared to let the rest of society know that these high concentrations of cancer-causing dioxin had been discovered in the source of drinking water for my community and the communities of a great many other people in this country.

● (1610)

This is a deeply serious problem as I said when I first raised this question with the Minister at the beginning of our dealings with the problem. It is a chronic problem which we have known about since 1979 and 1980. At that time studies by the Ministry of the Environment in Ontario identified benzines and chlorethylenes within the St. Clair River, all of which have cancer-causing properties. Yet, at that stage nothing was done. The nature of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that between 1972 and 1984, 275 spills took place in the chemical valley. That is a totally irresponsible, totally unacceptable, and totally abhorrent level of consistent, chronic pollution which we should have acted on years ago.

This problem has not only affected the St. Clair River. Studies have been done by the Great Lakes Research Institute which indicate through their analysis of octochlorostyrene that throughout much of Lake St. Clair, a large, large body of water, there has been a spread of the chemicals coming from the St. Clair River. It is a problem which has been recognized by the Royal Society itself just this past week. Its damning study said that the people of the Great Lakes region face toxic chemical levels far in excess of those in any other part of the country. This is, again, an unacceptable, intolerable, and abominable situation.

What are the solutions to this problem? There has been a myth crated by Dow Chemical that all that is required is a short-term cleanup of this blob from its properties in the St. Clair River. It claims that because of a great spill—which no one denies took place—of laundry cleaning fluid last summer. Yet, Mr. Speaker, this blob and its toxic qualities existed in 1984, before that large laundry cleaning spill took place. Therefore, we are dealing with a problem which is much more deep-rooted than is suggested by Dow's excuses. We have a problem that has its roots, in part, in the lack of government action to give us guidelines on water pollution. Scientists have told us that 36 out of 37 of the times within this blob do not even have guidelines to give us a direction as to what levels are safe within the waters outside our communities.

Above all, Mr. Speaker, we have a long-run challenge which is recognized by the Minister, although he does little about it

in this statement. The challenge is recognized by the interim report of the scientists who have investigated the issue of a long-run problem of seepage from deep-pressure wells which have already had their effect in the tunnel that goes beneath the river at Sarnia.

We have challenges, Mr. Speaker, but from challenges there are lessons that we can learn. The lesson in this case is to toughen significantly the action that we as a society take against this pollution problem in our waters. This problem does not only affect our drinking water, but, through the food chain, affects our fish life and, through evaporation, affects the rain which falls on the crops on some of the best agricultural lands in the country.

We must respond with urgency. I fear, Mr. Speaker, that the vague commitments in this statement, welcome as they are, are not urgent enough. There are no commitments in this statement to ending the self-compliance by the companies in studying pollution. That is crucially required. Self-compliance has proven to be a recipe for irresponsibility on the part of the companies. There is no commitment to put in place urgently a zero discharge process which will stop, rather than reduce, the discharge of these dangerous toxic chemicals into our waterways. There is no commitment to making pollution a criminal matter as should surely be the case after 275 spills. There is no commitment to this ministry spending the money to give us the details we require for the new guidelines which will be able to give our communities a sense of security in their drinking waters in the future. There is no commitment to reinstate the cuts to agencies such as the Toxicology Research Centre at the University of Guelph.

There is no commitment to restore morale within this Ministry. I do not think the Minister is responsible for that decline in morale, but that his Government is. I say to him with regret that he must take that decline in morale seriously. It must be a matter of urgent concern when some of the best scientists are seeking to leave the Ministry. It must be a point of priority for him to change those conditions of poor morale.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I will make a point which has been made across Ontario. We have had far too many years of disaster in the St. Clair River, in the Niagara River, and in other parts of the country. We must have a commitment to probe why those disasters have been permitted to occur. The Environmental Law Society in Ontario has called for a judicial inquiry in the case of the St. Clair crisis. I support that call 100 per cent. Everyone in the House should support that call 100 per cent because we must get to the bottom of a situation that has allowed 275 spills to take place over a 12-year period.

● (1620)

Finally, I want to make a general point. Water pollution is not just a problem for Members of Parliament and Ministers. It is a problem for our communities and one which is killing people in our communities.

Our communities must fight back. They must form their own action groups and their own grass roots citizens' organizations, as has happened in Wallaceburg and in Windsor this