

Joint action is planned by both Canada and the U.S.



Innovation: A terry cloth conveyor belt developed to pick up Bunker "C" oil spills is one of several new Canadian techniques used in disasters. A conventional snow-blower blasts peat moss over polluted areas to absorb the oil.

tario. Even before the scare developed, engineers of the Ontario Water Resources Commission had located the mercury leaks at the firm's chlorine plants and plugged them. By April, pulp and paper mills, which use mercury compounds in their process, stopped doing so. But these actions came too late to prevent a shutdown of the \$4 million fishery in the area this year.

Following the Lake St. Clair discovery, U.S. authorities reported that mercury contamination was found in the streams, rivers and lakes of at least 23 states. In Canada, other traces were being found, including in the Ottawa River, which sweeps in a majestic but polluted arc past Parliament Hill. Quite naturally, water pollution control became a major topic of debate in the House of Commons during 1970.

The necessity for joint and decisive action from both Canada and the United States was recognized at a special conference held in Ottawa in June. A follow-up meeting in Washington in September mapped out strategy and set up sub-groups of officials to consider common water quality objectives and the implementation of programs.

Also in early September, the Province of Ontario convened a conference of Canadian provinces and American states, with both Federal Governments present as observers, to seek agreement on cooperation and action for cleaning up the environment of the Great Lakes region.

According to Peter M. Bird, Director of Environmental Health in the Department of National Health and Welfare, it is now clear that the pollution problem in Canada is so huge that "voluntary actions are unlikely to be sufficient" in the effort to clean it up. On

the other hand, there are a series of constitutional and bureaucratic road-blocks in the formulation of a legislative response to the water pollution crisis. For one thing, water is largely under provincial jurisdiction, though parts of it—harbors, navigable rivers, boundary water and waterfowl habitat and the general field of fisheries—come under Federal Government control.

Despite the drawbacks, several pieces of anti-pollution legislation are now on the books. The main one is the Canada Water Act, which became law June 28. The legislation provides fines of up to \$5,000 a day for industries depositing waste of any type in any waters designated as a Quality Management Area. It also gives the Federal Government authority to set up crown corporations to build sewage treatment plants where necessary across Canada. It remains to be seen how these agencies will work. Already, critics suggest they may be subject to legal attack and foot-dragging by both provincial governments and polluters.

Also under the Act, Canada has prohibited the sale of laundry detergents containing more than 20 per cent phos-

phates. At the beginning of the new parliamentary session this month, the Speech from the Throne forecast the creation of a new Federal department to deal with pollution control, and legislation is promised on ocean and air pollution. The new department would "be concerned with the environment and the husbanding of those renewable resources that are a part of it and dependent upon it with a mandate for the protection of the biosphere."

Pollution control is coordinated between Canada and the United States chiefly through the International Joint Commission. The I.J.C. is concerned with all matters relating to the boundary waters and pollution has become its main preoccupation in recent years.

Its studies and special hearings on pollution in the Great Lakes have had their impact in getting combative measures taken. The I.J.C. is expected to bring down a final report on pollution in the lakes later this year; once that is done the U.S.-Canada Ministerial meeting of June will be reconvened to consider the Commission's recommendations and also to hear from the nine sub-groups established in September.

Ducks uncontaminated by mercury

Canadian and American duck hunters can rest easy as a result of game bird testing for mercury contamination just undertaken by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa. The duck hunting season will continue as usual.

Tests for mercury contamination of ducks taken from widely-scattered locations in eastern Canada indicate that the general level is below .5 parts per million. While safe limits have not been established for game birds as human food, the maximum for fish has been set at .5 parts per million. Samples were taken from Lake St. Clair, the Ottawa River, and the St. Lawrence River—waters where mercury contamination has been a problem. Samples were also taken in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the prairie provinces.