

métaux, uranium et matériel nucléaire, conservation de l'énergie - et a examiné le programme d'activités pour les prochains mois. Parmi celles-ci soulignons la tenue d'une réunion du groupe de travail "produits forestiers" à Ottawa en mai prochain et la visite en Europe à l'automne 1981 de deux missions canadiennes, l'une dans le secteur de l'énergie électrique et l'autre dans celui des transports urbains. Le Sous-Comité a entériné la création d'un groupe de travail dans ce dernier domaine. En outre, on a poursuivi l'échange d'informations amorcé en novembre 1980 (voir Bulletin Canada du 15 décembre 1980) sur le développement des politiques industrielles de la Communauté et du Canada dans le domaine de la télématique.

ACID RAIN: HOW MANY MORE LAKES HAVE TO DIE?

In 1972 the future of the Great Lakes was hazy and dim. Phosphorus from laundry detergents, sewage washes and fertilizers were feeding the algae, and in Lake Erie the spreading algae were consuming virtually all the oxygen and overwhelming the fish. That year Canada and the United States signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and began to clear up the system. There are already clear signs of improvement: water quality has been improved and fish resources are being restored.

Now both countries are facing a major new problem - acid rain - and a new challenge to their bilateral relations. Every day across Canada and the United States fountains of hot gases - the oxides of sulphur and nitrogen - stream upward into the atmosphere to form oxide clouds. The particles which form them combine with water vapour or other gases to form sulphuric or nitric acid. This acidic haze may travel thousands of kilometres eastward and northward during periods of up to ten days before falling to earth in the form of rain or snow.

A single shower of acid rain would normally have little measurable effect, although there have been amazing concentrations recorded such as the rain which fell at Pitlochry, Scotland, on April 10, 1974, with a pH level of 2.4 - the equivalent of vinegar. But it is the repeated soaking and the accumulation over time which causes real concern. In the past two years some 140 lakes in Ontario have been declared biologically dead. Another 48,000 are threatened and half of these are expected to die within the next decade. Canadian researchers have determined that the increased aluminium content of soils, believed to have been caused by acid rain, is hindering germination of seeds and seedling establishment of certain forest species. The rate of forest growth has declined, but no causal relationship with acid rain has yet been proven. The acids damage buildings and monuments, especially those made of limestone and marble. This has been of particular concern in Europe, but even relatively new buildings such as the Canadian Parliament buildings in Ottawa have deteriorated.

The only permanent solution to the acid rain problem is to keep the acid levels low, either by changing energy use patterns or by stopping the emissions at the source. Those from coal-burning plants for example, can be controlled with varying degrees of success by using low-sulphur fuels, by removing the sulphur from the fuel before it is burned, or by "scrubbing" the gases in the smokestacks.