

## ***International Joint Commission 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial State of the Great Lakes Report Addresses Contaminated Sediments***

The 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Report on Great Lakes Water Quality was released on September 12<sup>th</sup> by the International Joint Commission (IJC) (the Report). Chapter 2 focuses on sediments and is entitled *Toward Chemical Integrity: The Challenge of Contaminated Sediment and Human Health Impacts*. The Report suggests that concentrations of PCBs in the waters of the Great Lakes are approximately ten times higher than the Great Lakes Initiative's criteria for protection of human health. The Report also opines that the most significant known human exposure to toxins from the lakes comes from consuming contaminated Great Lakes fish. The Report concludes that the greatest source of contaminants to the Great Lakes food chain is contaminated sediments.

With respect to remediation efforts on contaminated sediments, the Report points to the Niagara River in New York, the St. Lawrence River in Massena, New York and Waukegan Harbor in Illinois in the United States and Thunder Bay in Ontario as examples of success stories.

Nevertheless, the bottom line of the Report is that there has not been adequate progress in addressing contaminated sediments in the Great Lakes. It chastizes the timeframe of 10 to 20 years from problem identification to remediation as typical and unacceptable. The Report also estimates that PCBs are found in the Great Lakes as follows: Lake Superior, 3,300 kg; Lake Michigan, 8,700 kg; and Lake Ontario, 115,000 kg. Lake Michigan's estimate does not include Green Bay, which has been calculated separately as containing 68,000 kg. The Report also points the finger at volatilization of PCBs from the water column which then can be redeposited into the open lakes by prevailing winds as a significant contributor to the continued "health"

problems with the Great Lakes. As an example, the Report estimates that Lake Michigan receives 3,200 kg per year of PCBs through air disposition.

The summary recommendation of the Biennial Report is to accelerate the pace of contaminated sediment remediation while working to overcome barriers to progress identified at each site. The Report suggests that often times the obstacles in addressing the Great Lakes' Areas of Concern have stemmed from lack of funding and a predominance of orphan-share sites. At the same time, however, there are a number of Areas of Concern with potentially responsible parties in the wings.

The Report urges action against PRPs:

[i]n those cases where perpetrators can be found, some means must follow by which they pay for problems they have caused.

The Report recommends that three remedial starts be initiated each year beginning in 2002. And, beginning in 2004, the Report recommends that three sediment remedial actions per year be completed until all known sites in the basin are addressed. The final goal is to complete cleanup of all known sites in the basin by 2025.

The full Report can be downloaded from the IJC web page: [www.ijc.org](http://www.ijc.org).

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