

WORKGROUP ACTIVITY UPDATE 2002

The Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy was signed by Canada and the United States in 1997 and represents the most comprehensive effort by the two countries to date to achieve a mutually agreed-to commitment to virtually eliminate persistent toxic substances from the Great Lakes environment. The Strategy brings together Environment Canada (EC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), industries, and environmental and community groups on both sides of the border in a wide range of action-oriented measures for addressing “Level I” substances that EC and EPA have identified as having “immediate priority” for virtual elimination. These substances include mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dioxins and furans, hexachlorobenzene (HCB) and benzo(a)pyrene (B(a)P), octachlorostyrene (OCS), alkyl-lead, and five cancelled pesticides, including aldrin/dieldrin, chlordane, DDT, mirex, and toxaphene. Substance-specific workgroups, established under the Strategy, work to eliminate Level I substances from the Great Lakes Basin. These efforts build upon the ongoing work of existing Great Lakes programs on both sides of the border. The recent accomplishments and ongoing efforts of these workgroups are highlighted below.

Mercury Workgroup:

Progress toward both the U.S. and Canadian challenge goals continues. Estimated U.S. mercury emissions have decreased more than 40% between 1990 and 2001. By 2006, additional regulations and voluntary activities are expected to reduce mercury emissions a total of 50% or more, achieving the U.S. reduction challenge. Available data indicate that mercury use declined in the U.S. by more than 50% between 1995 and 2001. In Canada, mercury releases have been reduced by 78% from the 1988 baseline. The Workgroup continues to focus on information-sharing about cost-effective reduction opportunities and publicizing voluntary achievements in mercury reduction. A Mercury Workgroup meeting on December 2 will focus on the issue of mercury releases from dental offices and helping state and local governments identify cost effective reduction approaches for this sector. A report on dental sector mercury reduction options for state and local governments will be compiled.

PCB Workgroup:

Both countries report progress in reducing inventories of high-level PCBs nationally and throughout the Great Lakes Basin. In Ontario, approximately 84% of high-level PCBs had been destroyed as of April 2002. Estimates of the reduction in PCB transformers in the U.S. between 1994 and 2000 range from 33% to 90%. The Workgroup continues to evaluate ways to better quantify the data and help track progress toward meeting the U.S. challenge. The Workgroup plans to continue seeking reduction commitments by mailing information about reducing PCBs to individual businesses and trade associations and plans to improve outreach and communication tools. The Workgroup also continues to develop and distribute information to facilitate the identification and safe removal of PCB equipment.

Dioxins/Furans Workgroup:

Both countries have made significant progress toward reaching the dioxin/furan reduction goals outlined in the Strategy. Since 1988, the U.S. has achieved a 77% reduction in dioxin emissions and estimates a 92% reduction by 2004. Canada has achieved a 79% reduction, relative to the 1988 Canadian baseline. Under a renewed Canada-Ontario Agreement aimed at addressing ecosystem issues in the Great Lakes, a 90% reduction is expected by 2005. During the past year, the Workgroup has discussed the issues of ash management and pentachlorophenol-treated wood. The Burn Barrel Subgroup is working with both governments and with partners in States, Provinces, Tribes, First Nations, municipalities, industries, and environmental and health organizations to implement its Household Garbage Burning Strategy in the Great Lakes Basin.

HCB/B(a)P Workgroup:

Both Canada and the U.S. are making progress in reducing emissions of HCB and B(a)P. Workshops are being held in four regions in Ontario on ways of making residential wood-burning safer, cleaner, and more efficient. By demonstrating the difference between old and new technologies in wood stoves and persuading Great Lakes residents to turn in their old wood stoves and inserts for cleaner burning appliances, these workshops are an important step in reducing B(a)P emissions from residential wood combustion. In an effort to reduce B(a)P emissions from scrap tire fires, the Workgroup is also working to promote the Midwest as a scrap tire recycling hub and to develop incentives to encourage tire processing plants to locate in the Midwest states. The Workgroup continues to update emission inventories, fill data gaps, and obtain voluntary reductions from major source sectors. For example, the Workgroup is seeking to confirm HCB releases from the application of pest control products and, if necessary, develop an effective reduction strategy with stakeholders.

Integration Workgroup:

The Integration Workgroup meets on a quarterly basis. The Workgroup assists with organizational, administrative, process, and other cross-cutting issues that are relevant to but outside the scope of the substance-specific workgroups. The Integration Workgroup also suggests strategic pathways forward. Integration Workgroup Priorities for 2003 include:

- A Long Range Transport Workshop
- Chemicals of Emerging Concern in the Great Lakes Basin
- Focus on Pilots Projects in the POTW and Municipal Sectors

Upcoming Meetings

Integration Workgroup -
February 25, 2003, Windsor
Stakeholder Forum and Substance-
Specific Workgroup Meetings -
May 14, 2003, Toronto
Integration Workgroup -
May 15, 2003, Toronto