

Clean up U.S. dump site

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One of the world's deadliest chemical dumps is the Hyde Park liquid waste dump in Niagara Falls, New York. The 14 acre site on the American shore of the Niagara River contains some 80,000 tons of toxic chemicals; a dangerous witch's brew of mirex, benzene, isomers of lindane, and an estimated 2,000 pounds of TCDD — a form of dioxin that is the deadliest of the man-made chemicals.

But although the dump threatens the health and the environment of Canadians as well as Americans, and affects the quality of water in two shared bodies — the Niagara River and Lake Ontario — the site, and proposals for its clean-up are under American jurisdiction.

That has Canadian environment officials worried — and with good reason. TCDD has already been found in fish taken from Lake Ontario, and, in higher concentrations, in the gulls that feed on those fish. It is not yet known how much dioxin has already found its way into the tissues of the millions of Canadians in the "golden triangle" of southern Ontario who take their drinking water from the lake.

It is known that 1/200th of a drop of this form of dioxin can kill a man; lesser amounts damage the spleen, liver, lungs, brain, and central nervous system. It has been shown to cause birth defects and cancers. And the Hyde Park dump has

been identified as the major source of dioxin contamination in Lake Ontario.

Obviously, this country has a fairly large stake in seeing the Hyde Park dump site cleaned up — properly. The current proposals put forward by Hooker Chemical Co. Ltd., which owns the dump, are considered by Canadian ecologists to be hopelessly inadequate.

The only way that they, and the government of Canada, can get its views across is by filing affidavits and letters of complaint in the American court that is considering the suitability of the Hooker proposals.

Our officials have done so, but in the final analysis it will be up to New York State, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to decide whether Hooker's plans are satisfactory.

It's a frustrating and potentially dangerous situation. American courts, environment officials, and government representatives should pay the closest attention to legitimate Canadian concerns about the Hyde Park dump, and should give full weight to our technicians' reports.

In the future, moreover, careful consideration should be given to setting up some kind of bilateral agency that would be empowered to explore and arbitrate in cases where the disposal of hazardous wastes on one side of the border would adversely affect people on the other. Hyde Park dump is one of the worst examples of this sort of dilemma — but it is by no means the only one.