

U.S. controls on dump's poisons called too lax

By Peter Rickwood Toronto Star

BUFFALO — Canadian fears over the “inadequacy” of proposals to control a deadly chemical dump — whose contents could destroy Lake Ontario — are expected to be expressed in a U.S. federal courtroom this afternoon.

On the final day of an unprecedented court hearing, Canadian hydrogeologist Grant Anderson is to take the stand in a last-ditch effort to convince a U.S. judge that the proposals are unsound.

Earlier this year, Hooker Chemical of Niagara Falls, N.Y., reached a secret agreement with the U.S. government for a clean-up of the notorious Hyde Park chemical dump, a worked-out claypit less than a mile from the Niagara gorge.

The 14-acre dump, less than four miles from Hooker's Love Canal dump — contains 80,000 tons of lethal wastes. It is considered to be one of the world's most toxic waste disposal sites.

Buried in the heart of the dump, about one mile south of the Lewiston-Queenston International Bridge, is an estimated 2,000 pounds of dioxin TCDD — the world's largest known deposit.

The cancer-causing agent is the most toxic chemical known to man. If one shovelful of the waste containing the dioxin entered the Niagara River the damage to Lake Ontario could be irreversible, claims Environment Canada.

Dangerously inadequate

Anderson, in a scathing brief presented in June on behalf of the Toronto-based Pollution Probe to the U.S. court, claimed that the plans to clean up the dump are dangerously inadequate.

Those plans, endorsed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were based on wrong assumptions about the direction of underground waterflow from the dump, Anderson warned.

It was a result of Anderson's objection and several others presented after details of the proposal were released that the current U.S. District Court hearing was ordered.

It's believed to be the first time in U.S. legal history that a public hearing has been required after a tentative proposal with a U.S. government agency has been reached.

Although Anderson represents Pollution Probe, the Canadian government is paying for his services because it is so concerned about the issue. Ottawa cannot become directly involved in the dispute for diplomatic reasons.

But a spokesman for federal Environment Minister John Roberts says that the minister regards the issue with the same gravity as acid rain.