

102nd Street

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, TUESDAY, MAY 22, 1984

M3

Niagara toxic waste talks near completion in U.S.

By JOCK FERGUSON

The U.S. and New York State governments and two chemical companies are close to agreeing to a method of containing a leaking hazardous waste site on the Niagara River.

The 102nd Street dump on the Niagara River is jointly owned by two giant chemical companies, Olin Corp. and Occidental Chemicals Corp., formerly Hooker Chemicals and Plastics Corp. It contains 91,500 tonnes of extremely hazardous chemical waste.

It took the two governments five years to complete negotiations with Hooker to get them to contain the thousands of tonnes of hazardous wastes it put in two other Niagara Falls, N.Y., dump sites.

The Hooker Hyde Park dump contains an estimated 900 kilograms of the extremely toxic chemical 2,3,7,8-dioxin while the S-Area site, directly behind part of the Hooker plant on the edge of the river, is leaking into the water intake for the City of Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Murray Sharkey, a hazardous waste expert involved in the 102nd Street negotiations for New York State, said he expected the agreement on a plan to investigate the extent and spread of contaminants on the site would come at meetings in Washington scheduled for the end of the week.

Waste was dumped into the 102nd Street site, also on the edge of the river, from the early 1940s to 1972, according to the U.S. Government suit filed against the two chemical companies.

The 102nd Street suit was filed against Hooker and Olin in 1979 along with three other suits against Hooker for the cleanup of Hyde Park, S-Area and Love Canal, four of the most seriously contaminated old hazardous waste sites in the United States.

Mr. Sharkey said the negotiations, which were imposed by a U.S. District Court judge on April 3, have gone quickly because of "knowledge gained from the S-Area and Hyde Park negotiations."

He expects the second phase of negotiations, on how to contain the waste, will also proceed quickly.

The suits, and the resulting settlements in the Hyde Park and S-Area cases, have been of interest to Canada because all four sites are leaking into the Niagara River, which flows into Lake Ontario. The lake supplies drinking water to more than eight million Canadians and one million U.S. residents.

Dioxin, which is believed to have migrated from the dumps, has been detected in very small

amounts in gull eggs, fish and drinking water taken from the lake.

Water samples, taken from the Niagara River for recent tests by Environment Canada, revealed 62 compounds and classes of compounds, including dioxin, chemically related furans and polychlorinated biphenyls.

Dioxin is a suspected carcinogen and is also thought to cause genetic damage.

Canadian Government officials are unhappy with the two negotiated settlements because recent tests have shown that the Hyde Park dump is continuing to leak into the Niagara River.

Canada is also unhappy with the U.S. refusal to examine seriously excavation of the dumps as a means of cleanup, according to Richard Findlay, a hazardous waste expert with Environment Canada.

He said in an interview yesterday that Canada was unhappy with its lack of clout in the previous negotiations and hopes to play a more significant role in discussions about the best way to contain the 102nd Street site.

He said "Canada's pressure on the U.S. Government" because of the lack of progress in improving the river may have been a factor in moving speedily to begin work on the 102nd Street dump.

If negotiations should break down at any point, the U.S. Government can still proceed with the special \$1.6-billion superfund legislation passed by Congress to clean up old hazardous waste sites. Under the legislation, the Government can sue the companies to recoup the cleanup costs plus damages.

The negotiations are supposed to be finished in time for the cleanup to take place this summer.

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