

Nothing left to cut



A field report on the activities of the
Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy

Ontario Public Service Employees Union

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OPSEU



SEFPO

How many cuts can the environment take?

This paper describes findings of a research project into the status of programs in the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy. The research was conducted by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union in the last three months of 1996.

On January 14, 1997, MoEE will officially announce the elimination of 303 jobs in the ministry, out of an estimated 1,770. This will include 186 jobs in the OPSEU bargaining unit, and 117 others. These cuts are only the latest in a series of reductions, the most dramatic of which occurred May 22, 1996, when roughly 350 MoEE employees lost their jobs.

The mandate of the ministry is to protect the environment. This becomes more difficult with each cut.

Official "workplans" of the ministry do not necessarily reflect the government's actual environmental protection work. Although prioritized lists of activities may well illustrate the work senior managers would *like* to do, there has been a steady decrease in the ministry's environmental protection activities since 1991, with the most dramatic setback occurring in the last 15 months. Today, even planned work cannot be done.

In the past three months, teams of ministry staff have been meeting in "Compliance Delivery Strategy" sessions to help departments respond to shrinking resources. These internal sessions are not subject to public consultation or input.

Surface water

There are 226,918 lakes in Ontario (including the Great Lakes) which are used for recreation, fishing and drinking water. These lakes cover 181,153 square kilometres, or 17 per cent of the total area of the province.

At one time, water quality in the province was routinely monitored through sampling of lakes, rivers and water courses to build a database to track contaminants. This information was used to determine if a particular lake could withstand further cottage development, whether a water course could handle a sewage treatment plant, and for other purposes.

The number of water monitoring stations dropped from nearly 700 in 1991 to just over 200 in 1996 (see figure 1). No surface water monitoring was done north of Barrie, where the majority of water courses are located, for the 1996-1997 work year.

Very little water monitoring was done elsewhere. Sampling locations

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have been reduced by 80 per cent in the Great Lakes in the past 5 years. The number of stations sampled dropped from approximately 500 in 1990 to 100 today.

Thirty years ago Lake Erie was declared virtually dead. Since then, combined efforts of governments around the Great Lakes have greatly improved water quality in the lake. The International Joint Commission now is concerned that, because of recent cuts by these same governments, "water pollution is likely to rise."¹

Government funded and directed acid rain research has resulted in several dead "acid" lakes being recovered. This research program has been virtually eliminated.

The Clean Up Rural Beaches program (CURB) has been terminated.

Figures 2 & 3 illustrate industrial and sewage-plant sources of pollution in Ontario.

Groundwater

Groundwater provides drinking water for 3.5 million people, or approximately 1/3 of the Ontario population. Groundwater supplies account for more than half of municipal water use. One-and-a-half million people use municipal groundwater supplies, while approximately two million have private wells.

Ministry staff look at approximately 2,000 groundwater contamination incidents per year and often discover faulty construction and poor maintenance of wells. These kinds of problems can result in direct contamination of the water table. In Smithville, cleanup costs of PCB groundwater and soil contamination have reached approximately \$25 million to date.

Despite this, inspections of well installations are no longer being done in some areas of the province. Verification of water well records is among the lowest enunciated priorities in the ministry's workplan.

Air

In October of 1996, Norm Sterling, Minister of the Environment and Energy, stated that "air quality [is] linked to the premature deaths of an estimated 1,800 Ontarians a year."

Over the last five years, there have been significant budget and staff cuts to the air sections of the Ministry. The ministry has run an air quality monitoring network throughout the province to provide ambient air quality data and to monitor point sources of air pollution.

The number of continuous air monitors in the province has decreased to the point where we are currently at a 20-year low (figures 4a, 4b, 4c). High population areas of Markham and Brampton have no air monitors. Mississauga, with a population of over half a million has just one monitor. Since 1992 there has been a 45% reduction in regional technical staff

who look after the air monitoring network (figure 5).

Vehicle emissions, known to be one of the major contributors to air pollution, are among the lowest enunciated priorities in the ministry workplan (see figure 6 and the Appendix).

Recently the provincial auditor criticized the state of our air monitoring network, and the out-dated state of our air quality standards. In May 1996, after the auditor's research was completed, more regional technical staff who look after the instruments and people engaged in setting air standards were laid off. Monitoring in support of standard development is not being done.

There is no standard in Ontario for benzene, a known carcinogen. The state of California requires fume recovery systems at gas stations to reduce benzene levels there.

A significant part of the air quality work is done by the "Phytotoxicology Section" which monitors, assesses and evaluates the effects of air pollution on the terrestrial environment (soil and vegetation - agricultural crops, forests, residential yards, etc.)

The phyto group has been eliminated from the northern part of the province. It did annual and periodic surveys around all significant industrial emitters. Samples of vegetation and soil were collected at strategic locations (permanent sample plots) around these sources and analyzed for contaminants associated with their emissions.

This data combined with ambient air monitoring data was used by the ministry and industry to determine trends in contamination over time.

Pesticides

Generally the public is unaware of the staggering amounts of pesticides applied annually to our agricultural crops, forests, backyards and buildings.

Thirty-four million kilograms of pesticides are used across Canada. Approximately 70% are used in agriculture.²

There are approximately 33,000 licenced commercial pesticides operators, vendors and exteminators in Ontario.

"Ninety-five percent of the pesticides used on residential lawns are considered possible or probable carcinogens.... A national Cancer Institute study of childhood leukemia found higher rates of cancer in households where lawn pesticides were used.... Globally, pesticide sales have increased from \$850 million in 1960 to more than \$26 billion in 1990, a 3,100 percent increase.... The National Cancer Institute found that owners of dogs with lymphoma (a type of cancer) reported using higher lawn pesticide use than owners of healthy dogs... Stormwater monitoring in the Great Lakes basin found significant levels of herbicide 2, 4-D in 53 percent of the samples tested, and significant levels of the insecticide diazinon in 47 percent of the samples tested..."³

"Vehicle emissions, known to be one of the major contributors to air pollution, are among the lowest enunciated priorities in the ministry workplan."



"Since May 1996, field pesticide staff have been cut by 40%, eliminating positions in Peterborough, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Chatham and Hamilton."



"A recent study conducted by Environment Canada and the University of Guelph showed that urban loading from lawns was appreciable. In the Lake Ontario basin, 2,640,000 pounds of pesticides were applied annually, 25% of which were urban residential.... A U.S. General Accounting (GAO) found that 56 million pounds are used in the Great Lakes basin, including 46 million pounds used on agricultural crops, 8 million pounds on lawns and 2 million pounds on golf courses.... As much as 20% of the Great Lakes basin depends on the Great Lakes as a drinking water source. Twelve of the 40 pesticides most commonly used are suspected carcinogens. New data shows growing concerns, especially among children."⁴

Some 20% of all households use the services of a pest control company (US); 66% of householders used lawn care pesticides; 36% used a professional lawn care company.

The world trend is to increased control and reduced use of pesticides. Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands have passed legislation mandating reductions of 50% or more in the total use of agricultural pesticides by the year 2000.

In 1995, approximately 200,000 kg of chemical pesticide and 1.5 million (billion international units) of biological pesticides were sprayed on Ontario forests.

Hundreds of aquatic spray permits are issued yearly in Ontario -- 400-500 in the eastern part of the province alone.

The goal of Ontario's pesticides program has been to ensure safe, legal application of pesticides in the province and the promotion of implementation of integrated pest management to reduce the chemical load on the environment.

Since May 1996, field pesticide staff have been cut by 40%, eliminating positions in Peterborough, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Chatham and Hamilton.

Spill Response

When a serious incident occurs, the public looks to the ministry to identify the spilled pollutant, quantify it, track its travel, and alert them to possible hazards and the time it might reach them. With ministry equipment steadily deteriorating, and field staff no longer routinely in the field monitoring pollutants, the Ministry's ability to respond effectively to a major disaster -- the next Hagersville tire fire or Matachewan tailings spill -- may be questioned.

Enforcement/Prosecution

In the 1996 KPMG Canadian Environmental Management Survey of the country's 1,000 largest corporations, 93% of corporations responding gave "compliance with regulations" as their number one reason for taking action to protect the environment.

In 1985/86 in Ontario, 49 companies or persons were charged with environmental infractions. In 1994, that number had risen to 470. Fines assessed rose from \$605,668 to almost two-and-a-half million dollars over the same period.

Despite the demonstrated importance of strong enforcement, in May 1996 the government cut the ministry enforcement branch staff by approximately 10%. The prosecutions team in the Ministry's legal branch is down to four full-time prosecutors -- down from a high of 10 in the early 1990s.

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Self-monitoring by industry

To date, the Ontario ministry of environment has been considered a world leader in many aspects of its guardianship of the environment. It has used a number of tools to keep pollution in check, including inspections, spill response, permits, licences, certificates of approval and in the extreme, prosecution.

Until now to install equipment that may result in emission of pollutants in this province one needed to apply for a certificate of approval, a kind of licencing document to alert the ministry that you are operating and emitting a pollutant. Such an application prompted a review of circumstances before permitting the operation by way of the issuance of a certificate of approval.

Recent legislative changes have eliminated individualized reviews of approvals, instead substituting Standard Approval Regulations (SARs). Interest groups have expressed concern that a level of scrutiny will be lost, and because of massive budget cuts, there will be no auditing of such operations.

Also in the past such tools as pesticide permits have flagged ministry staff to a pesticide application and provided a much needed level of scrutiny. For example, inspections of shorelines for water intake would be triggered by an aquatic spray permit application. Aerial spray applications for forest and agricultural areas would be accompanied by topographical maps and aerial photos for review by ministry experts to ensure that there were adequate buffer zones, etc. The Ministry of Natural Resources would often fly over areas and do visual audits.

Because of the massive budget cuts in this ministry, it is not clear which traditional functions can continued to be performed.



Downsizing

In 1990 there were approximately 2,450 people in Toronto and 28 other centres around the province in MoEE looking after the air, water, and land in this province. They had an operating budget of \$308,000,000 (see figures 7 & 8).

By November 1995 the Ministry was down to approximately 2,000 permanent staff (excluding contract and senior management). This included major cuts to the Niagara Escarpment Commission and Energy and Conservation programs.

The 1996-97 operating budget was slashed to \$175,000,000. By June 1996, further staffing cuts dropped the ranks to 1,772 permanent staff. The upcoming January 13 layoffs will drop that number to 1,470.

The May 1996 layoffs cut significant numbers in all areas of environmental protection. Three regional labs were shut down and major cuts were made to remaining staff at the central laboratory. This has reduced the ministry's ability to quickly and widely analyse for contaminants in the environment.

Other areas that have been affected or are vulnerable now include waste management (people who track waste haulage, monitor pcb's, etc.), land use planning, approvals and more.

Abatement: The abatement section of the Ministry is staffed with dozens of environmental officers who are the ministry's generalists. Historically they have responded to complaints and spills, conducted inspections and performed a myriad of field tasks.

With ministry cutbacks and virtual elimination of some programs, many expert tasks are being downloaded on to these already overburdened generalists. With the virtual elimination of the Municipal Industrial Strategy for Abatement, waste management and groundwater and pesticides cuts, all of these tasks are being transferred to this group. Many of these functions require a specialized level of expertise.

Administration: The Sudbury regional office has been closed. The Thunder Bay office now supervises an area containing more than 90% of the land mass of Ontario. Increased costs for individual fares and chartered planes for staff meetings have already been incurred since the closure in May.

The public has been locked out of the remaining Sudbury office. With no receptionist, the office has been secured and staff have often found confused citizens at the door trying to access services.

Voice mail has been installed almost everywhere; access to services has been restricted. Because of cutbacks the North Bay office runs an answering machine in the afternoons and messages are only checked hourly.



Computer systems throughout the north are serviced out of Thunder Bay. Problems which cannot be resolved over the phone must wait until staff from Thunder Bay can travel to such locations as Gravenhurst, Parry Sound, Timmins and North Bay.

Figure 9 summarizes the nature of the work affected by the layoff notices issued May 22, 1996.

Conclusion

Figure 10 illustrates the significance of the Ontario government's operating expenditures on environmental protection, relative to the total budget. MoEE's budget accounts for less than half of one per cent of the total. As that number continues its downward slide, and as more and more environmental protection workers lose their jobs, Ontario's environment faces a grave crisis.



Notes:

¹Focus, International Joint Commission, November/December 1996).

²A Pesticide Reduction Policy For Canada, World Wildlife Fund, 1994)

³Great Lakes, Great Lawns produced by Wisconsin's Environmental Decade Institute (supported by Great Lakes Protection Fund, Great Lakes Pollution Prevention Centre and Environment Canada)

⁴Green Thumb produced by Wisconsin's Environmental Decade Institute, 1995.



Authorized for distribution:

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MOEE Water Quality Monitoring Stations

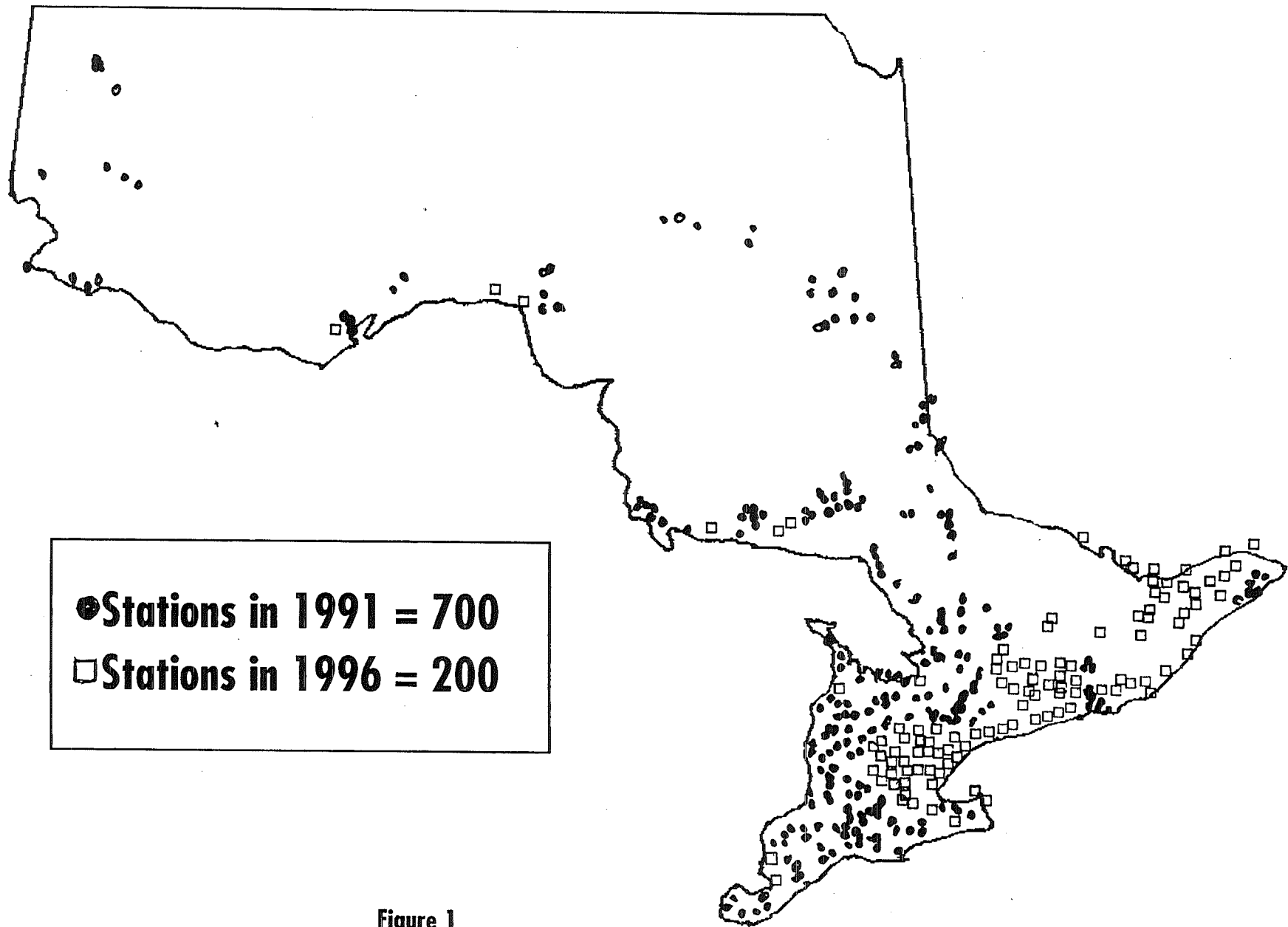


Figure 1

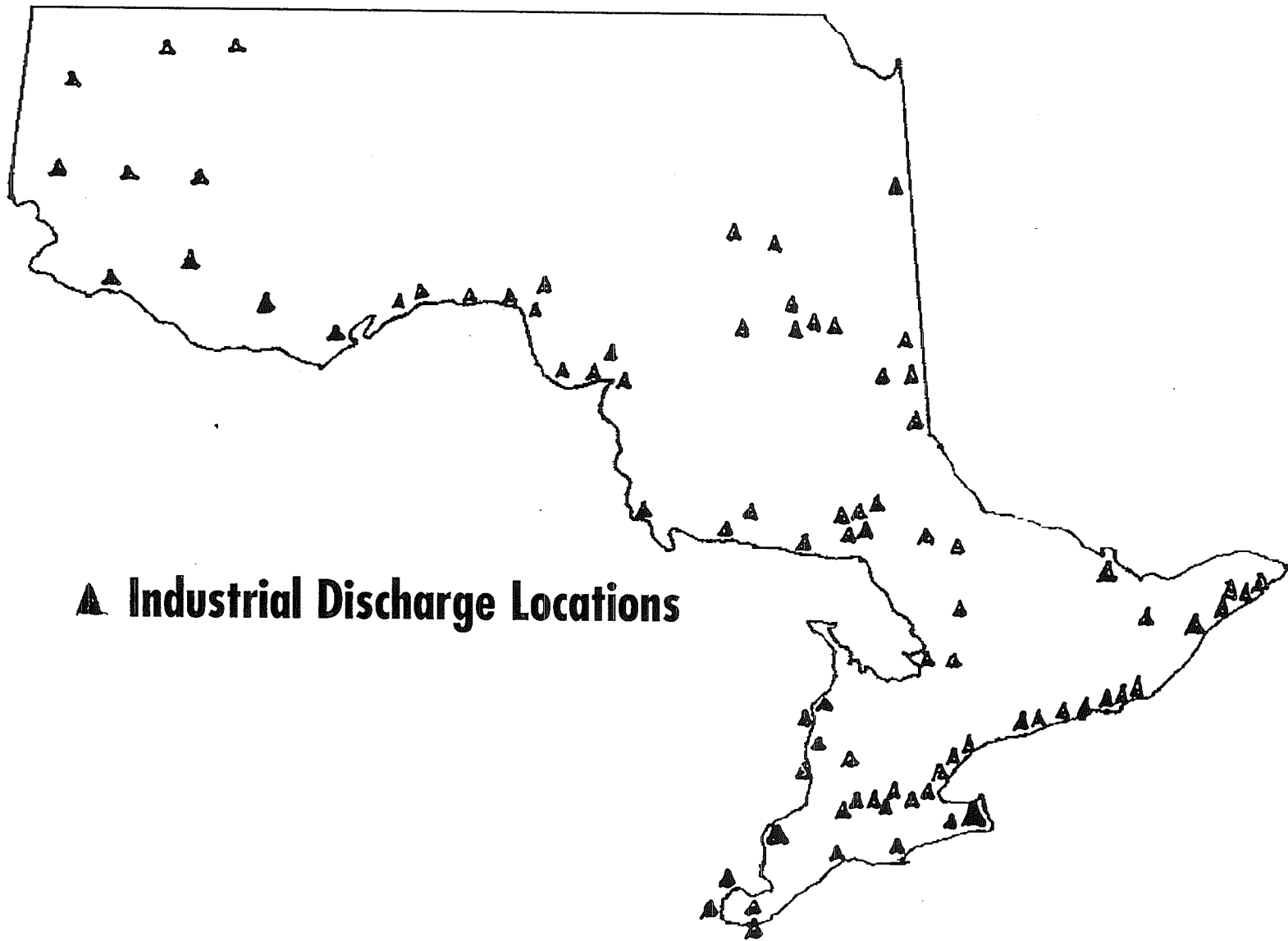


Figure 2

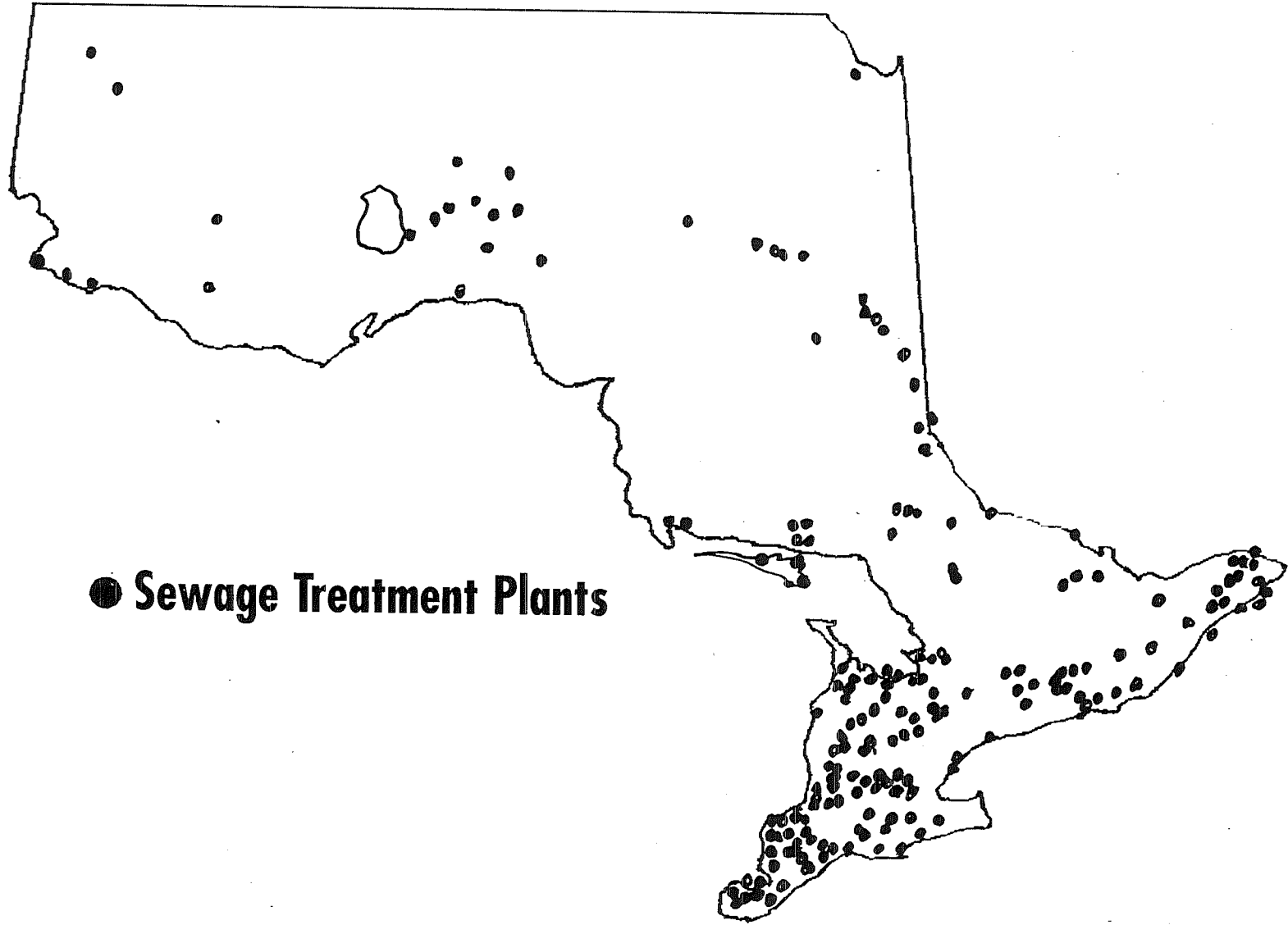


Figure 3

Number of Air Quality Stations 1992 to 1996

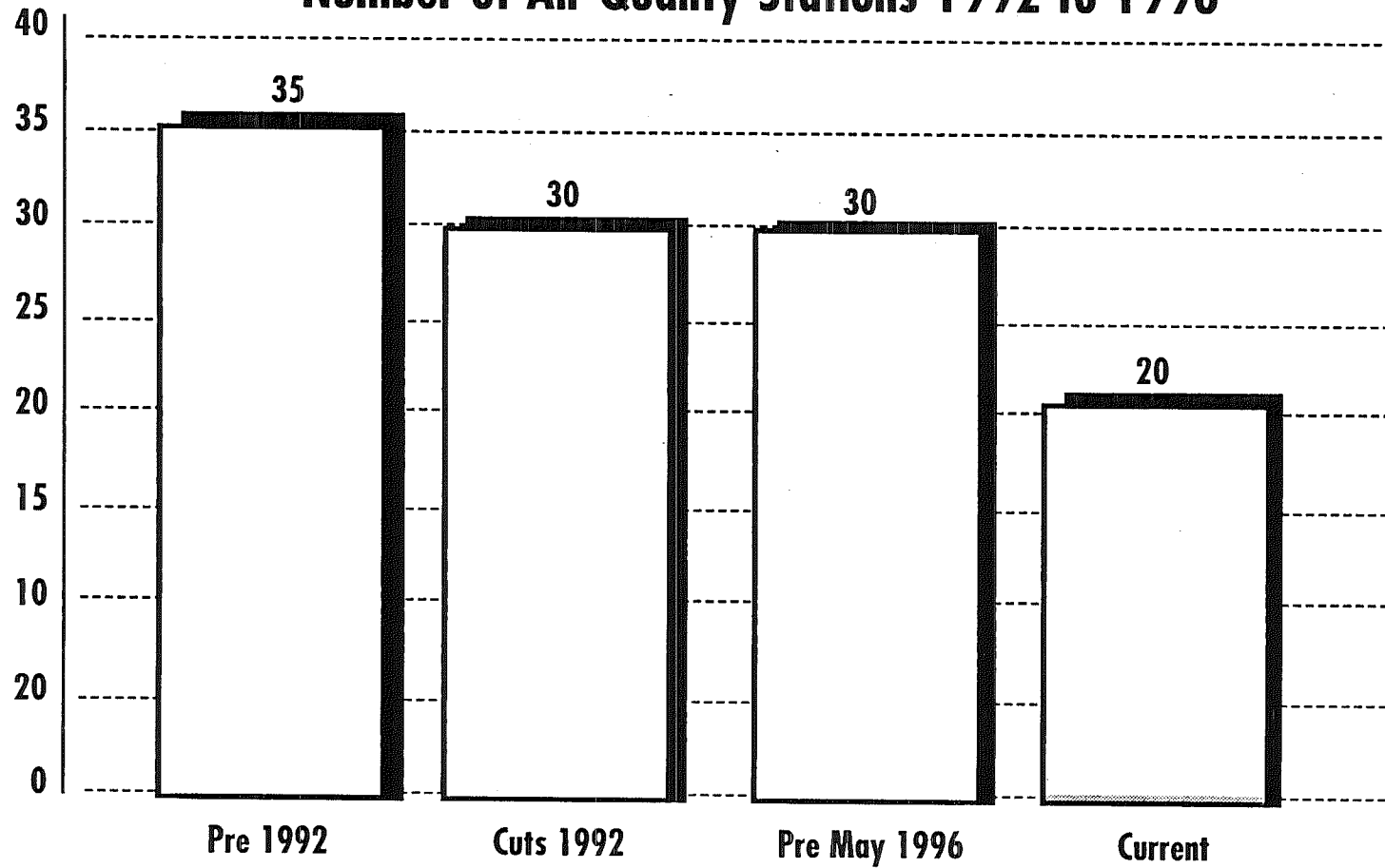


Figure 4a

Other Air Quality Stations 1992 to 1996

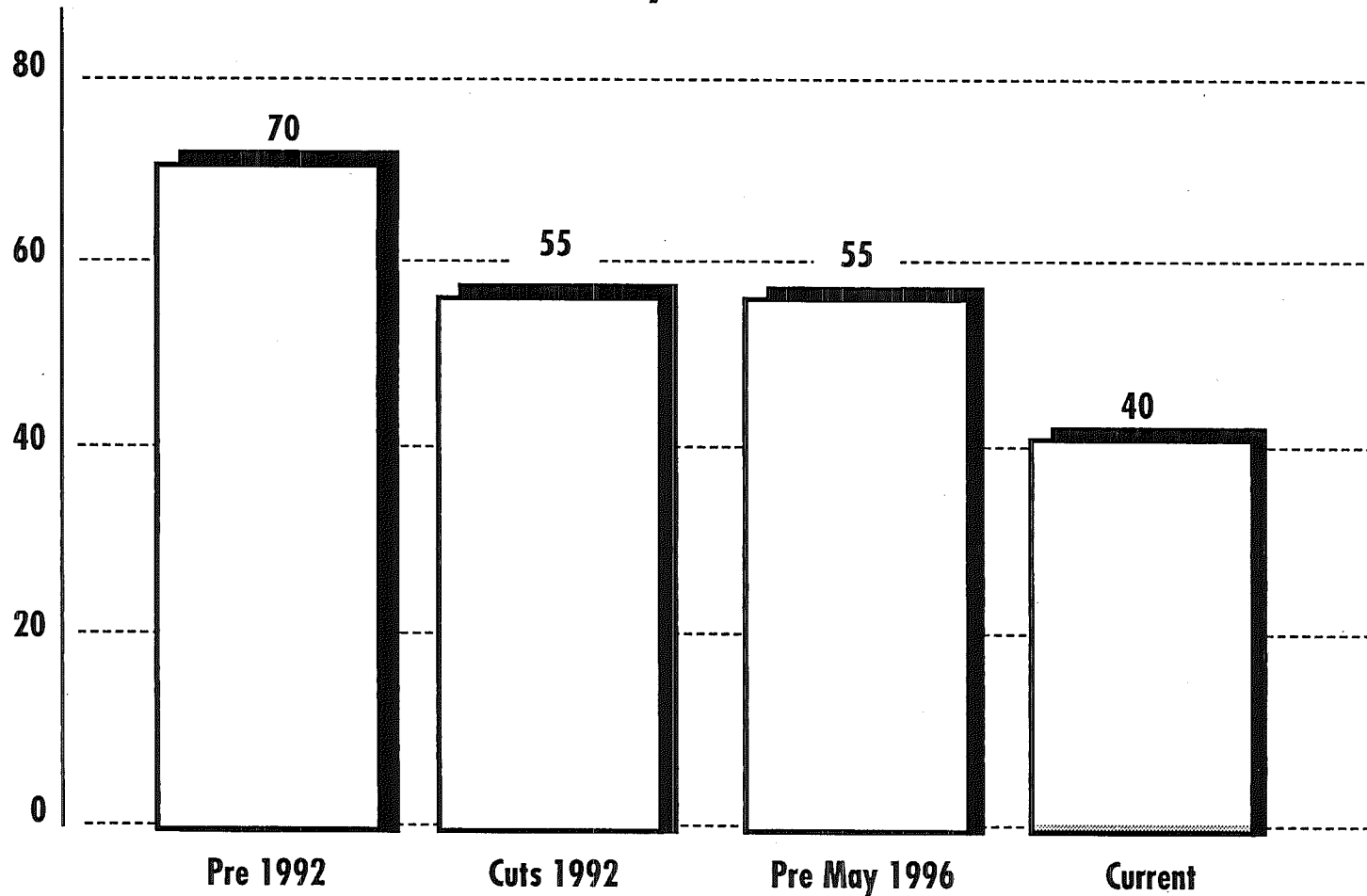


Figure 4b

Number of Continuous Monitoring Instruments 1992 to 1996

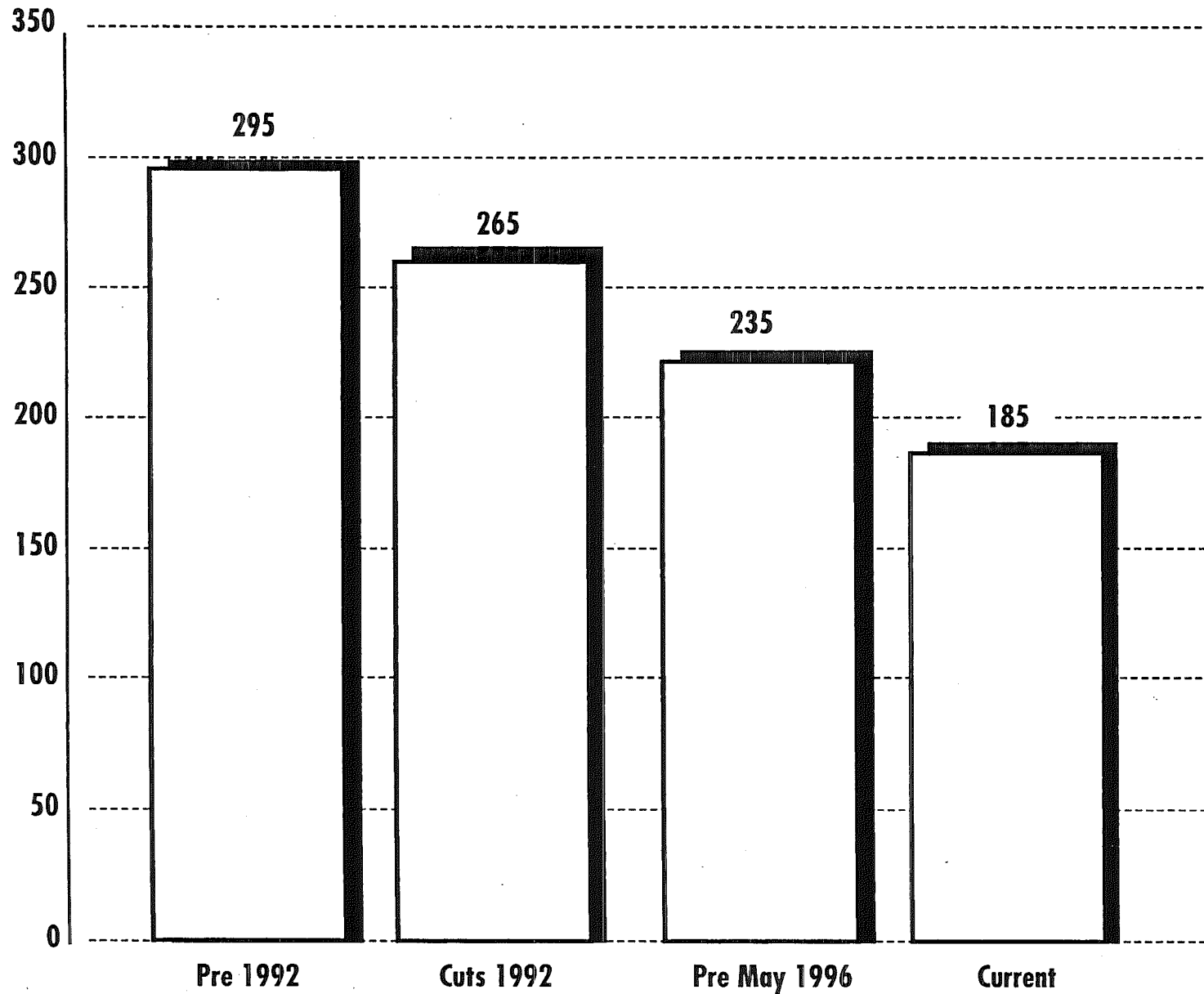


Figure 4c

Number of Technical Staff vs. Air Monitoring Instruments

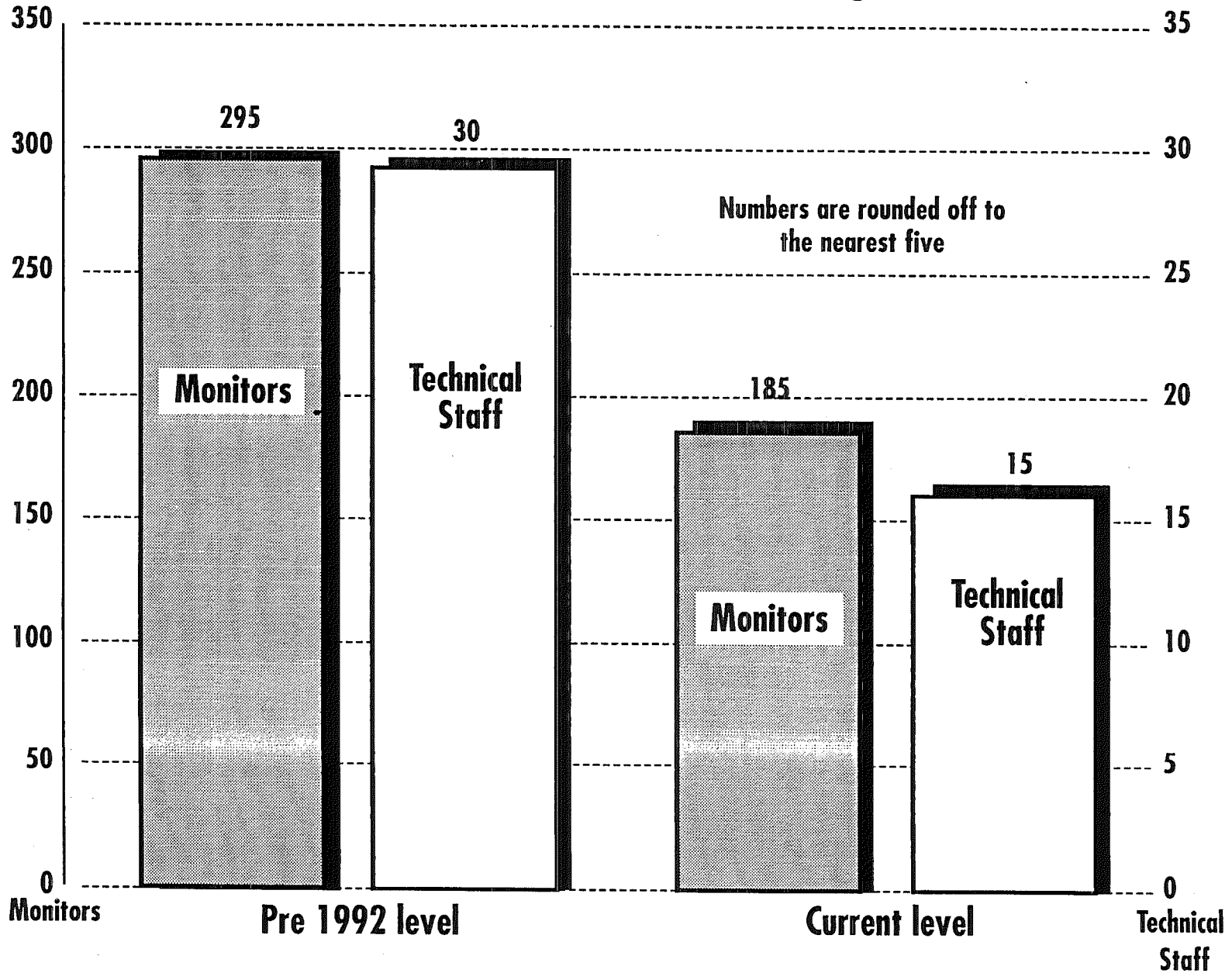


Figure 5

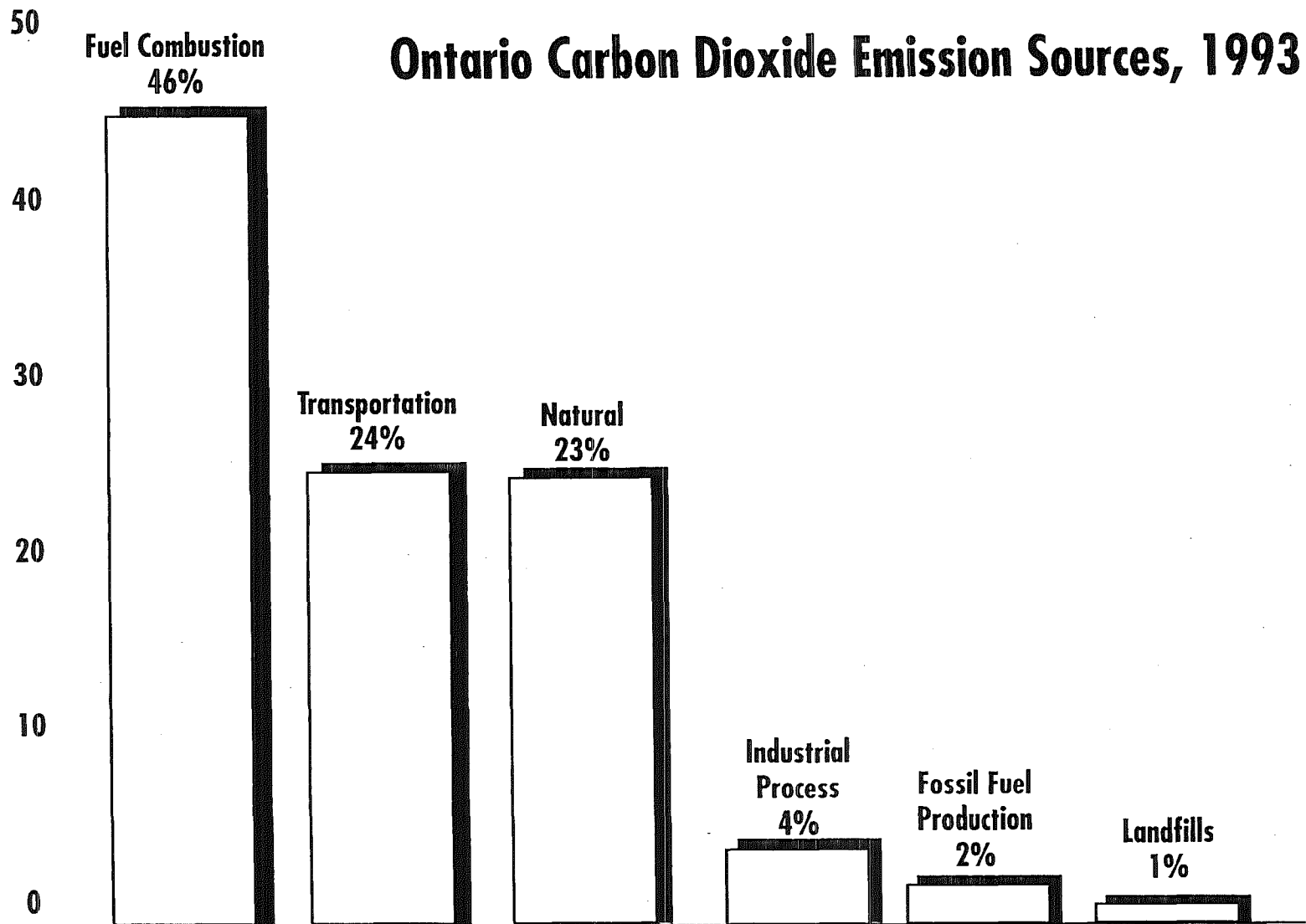


Figure 6

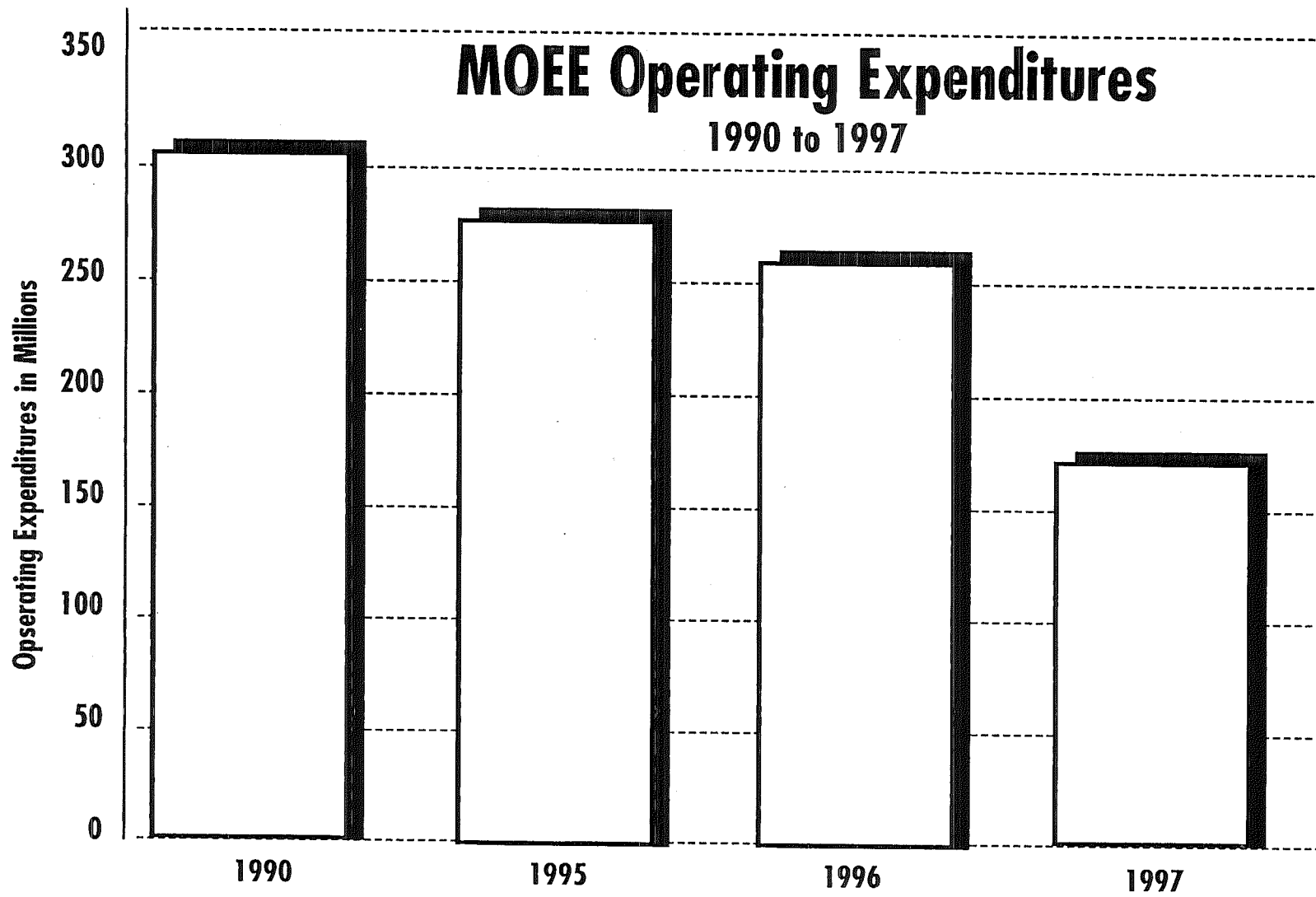


Figure 7

MOEE Staff

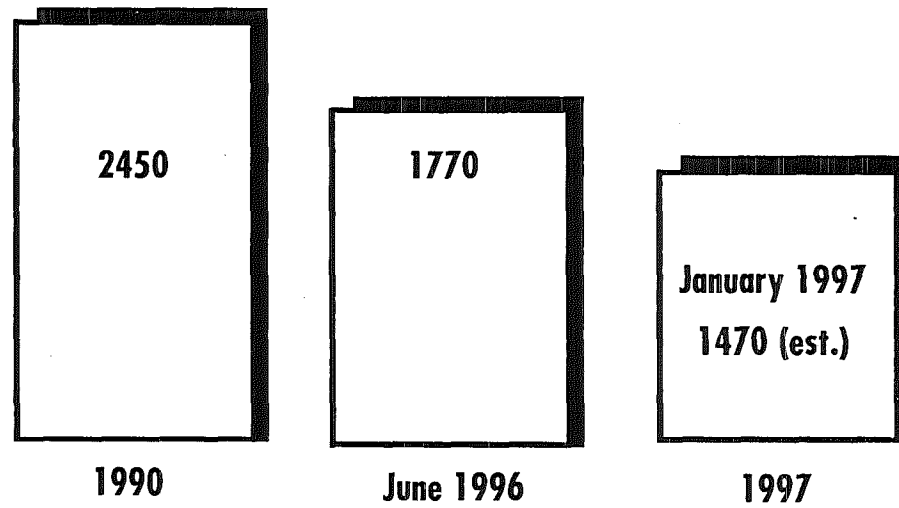


Figure 8

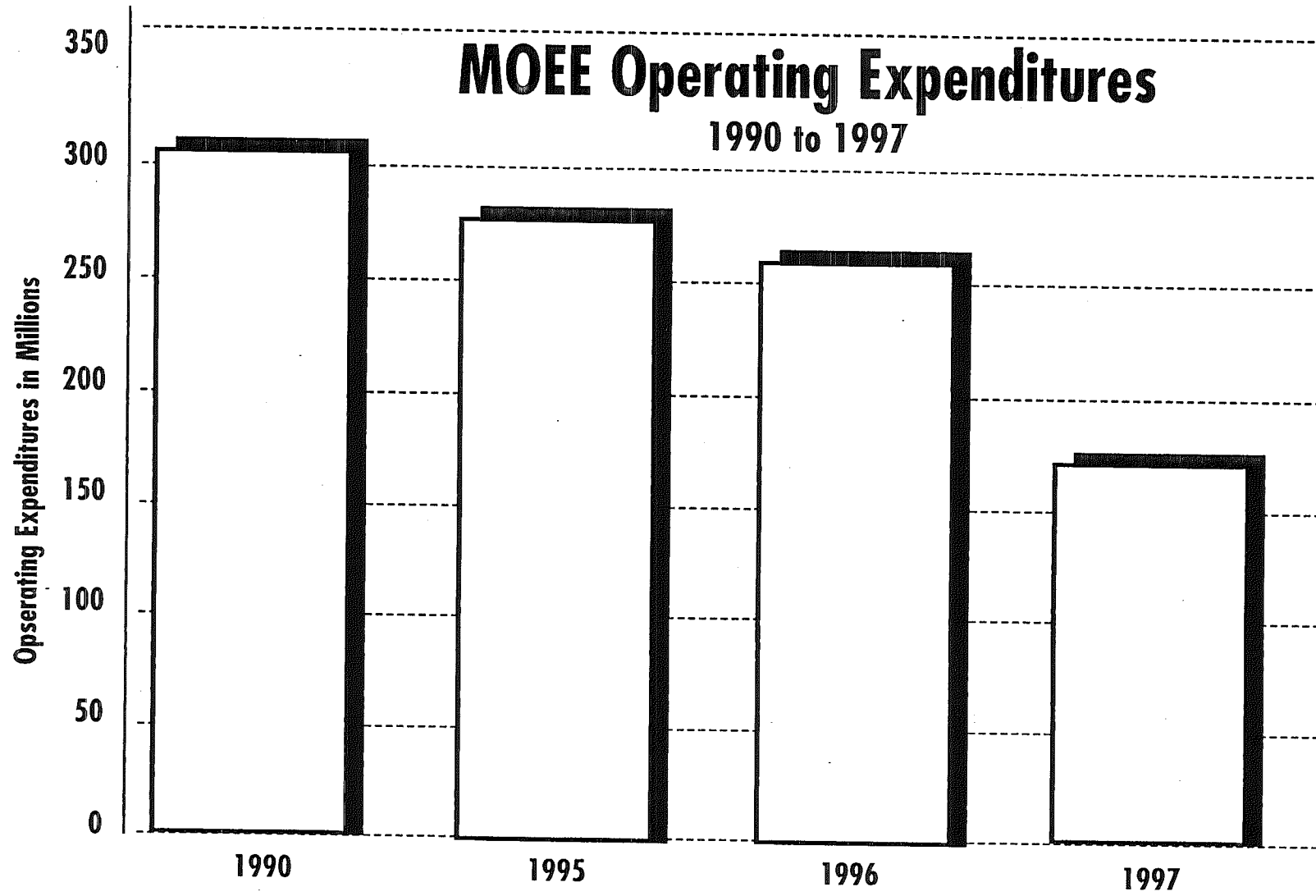


Figure 7

Ontario Government Operating Expenses, 1996-97

(in billions of dollars)

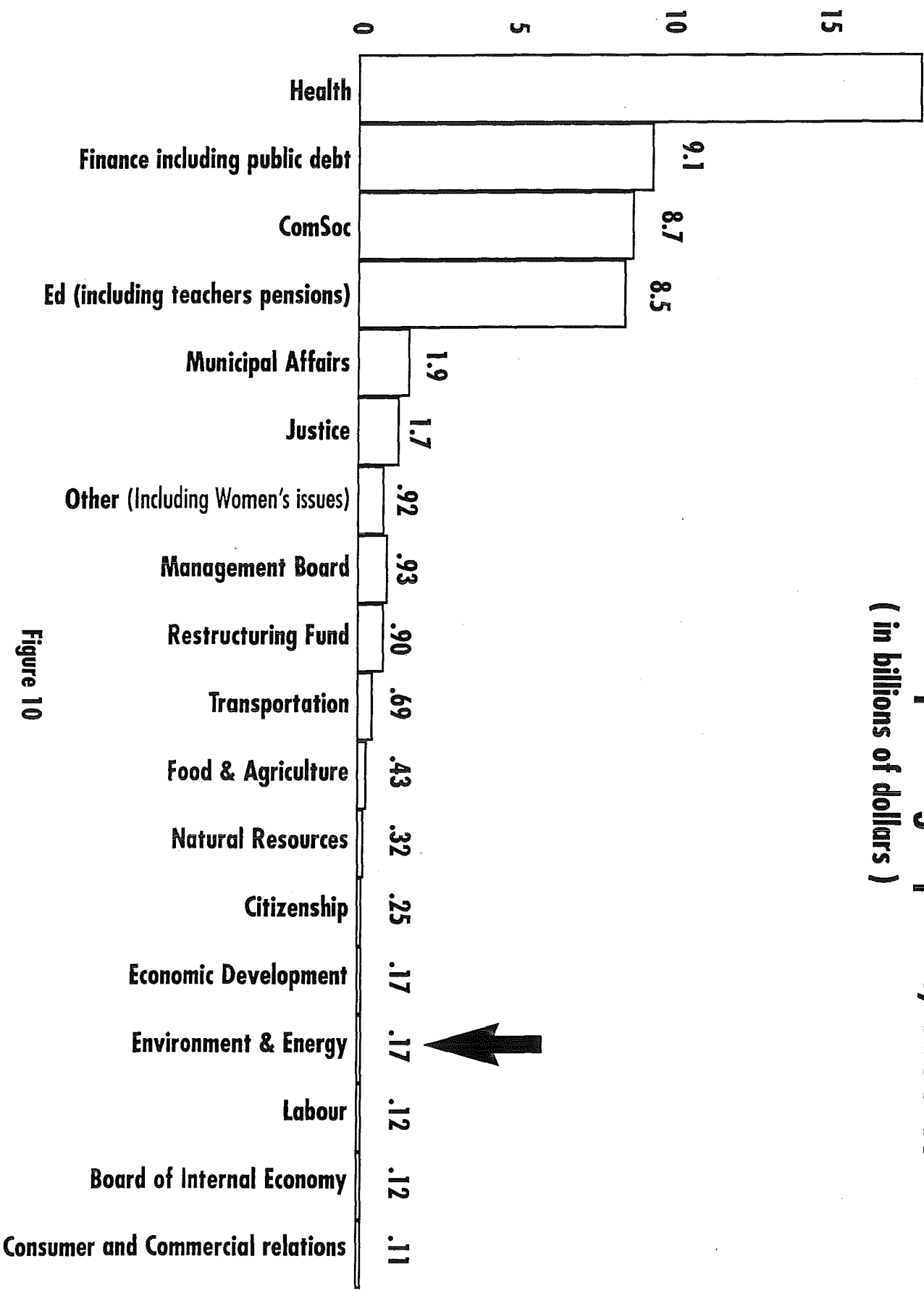


Figure 10

OPSEU & AMAPCEO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SURPLUSING BY ISSUE (December 31, 1996)

(Only staff associated directly with the issues listed below were included in the table)

<i>ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE</i>	<i>ORIGINAL STAFF</i>	<i>SURPLUSED STAFF</i>	<i>% SURPLUSED</i>
AIR	78	25	32%
TOXICS & PHYTOTOXICOLOGY	38	13	34%
SOIL	8	4	50%
PESTICIDES	31	17	55%
AQUATIC, AQUATIC TOXICOLOGY & ECOSYSTEM	28	6	21%
WATER & DRINKING WATER	113	48	42%
GROUNDWATER & HYDROGEOLOGY	28	15	53%
WATERSHED	12	3	25%
WASTEWATER	15	5	33%
WASTE	14	8	57%
WASTEREDUCTION	54	14	26%
SPILLS	5	3	60%
<i>TOTAL</i>	424	161	

Figure 9