

INFORMATION

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Following are extracts from a speech given by Iain Angus,
Fort William MPP, at Environment North's "Generations"
Conference, Saturday, July 31, 1976

ONTARIO MISSES BOAT

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment has missed the opportunity of a lifetime.

During the Fall of 1975 and early Winter 1976, the pulp and paper industry in Ontario was virtually shut down due to a labour/management dispute. For almost seven months, the major polluter of many of Ontario's lakes and rivers had stopped dumping effluent. This major shutdown had not occurred before in recent memory.

The day that George Kerr, MPP - Burlington South, was reappointed as Minister of the Environment for Ontario, he was contacted by me and I asked the Minister to begin intensified monitoring of the downstream portions of all those rivers on which a strike-bound paper mill was located.

On November 6, 1975, I asked the Minister what steps the Ministry had taken to do the analysis. Mr. Kerr replied as follows:

"As far as other mills are concerned, yes, we have the same type of surveillance and continuous analysis of the waters downstream...".

I received a letter from the Minister dated October 27, 1975, which listed the changes in water quality for the four Thunder Bay Mills. The change was so drastic that Ministry officials confided in me that while they had expected some change, they did not expect the degree that occurred.

Following are the list of Thunder Bay mills and the related changes in water quality.

Changes in Selected Water Quality

Parameters for 5 Stations

% change since mill shut-down
Mean value before shut-down
Mean value since shut-down

Site	Dissolved oxygen	BOD ₅ (organic matter)	Total phosphorus	Turbidity
Abitibi Thunder Bay mill 0.28 miles from point of discharge	+32 9.7 12.8	-74 5.4 1.4	-77 0.03 0.007	-70 3.7 1.1
Abitibi Thunder Bay mill 0.50 miles from point of discharge	+4 9.8 10.2	-96 50.6 1.8	-76 0.037 0.009	-79 6.05 1.3
Abitibi Provincial mill 0.50 miles from point of discharge	+36 6.4 8.7	-98 10.9 0.218	-73 0.04 0.011	-55 8.3 3.7
Abitibi Mission mill 0.67 miles from point of discharge	+57 6.3 9.9	-91 6.8 0.6	-63 0.038 0.014	-83 11.8 2.0
Great Lakes Paper 1.00 miles from point of discharge	+15 6.8 7.7	-97 30.4 1.0	-82 0.18 0.032	-53 10.1 4.7

Note: Dissolved oxygen, BOD₅ and Total phosphorus values are given in mg/l.
Turbidity values are in Hazen units.

One of the most interesting sidelights to the Thunder Bay situation was that for the first time in living memory, the water on the Kam River adjacent to the Great Lakes Paper Company actually froze over.

Stirred on by these impressive figures, I continued to press for the results for the remainder of the pulp and paper mills throughout the Province.

The Minister's responses in the Legislature indicated that the intensified sampling had been done and it was only a matter of time before the results would be sent to me.

It did, however, take considerable time and pressure before any further correspondence made its way from Mr. Kerr's office to mine. When it finally arrived on June 24th, it was a comparison between upstream and downstream conditions---not between pre-shutdown and shutdown on the downstream portion.

I sent the Minister a follow-up letter asking him where the requested information was. The reply, arrived on July 13, the day that the Ontario Legislature had been recalled to deal with retroactive wage and price legislation.

Mr. Kerr stated,

"Unfortunately, we do not have for each mill in Ontario water quality data which was provided for the Thunder Bay mills".

Shocked by this revelation, I rose in the Legislature on a point of personal privilege and asked for clarification from the Minister on the differences between what was quoted in Hansard (the verbatim parliamentary record) and the Minister's letter.

Mr. Kerr, in response, stated that NO testing was done on the mills other than those in Thunder Bay during the shutdown period.

So the Ontario Government has let slip by the opportunity of a lifetime. Hopefully, from the point of view of the workers in the mills, there will never be a mass shutdown again!

What are the ramifications? It is of no consequence to the environment who raised the issue. The important thing to note was that it was raised and in the instance of the Thunder Bay area, was acted upon.

Why did the Ministry of the Environment NOT do the intensified water analysis? What are the consequences of their non-action?

- a) The Ministry of the Environment can only rely on upstream vs. downstream comparisons as a basis for analysis of the degree of pollution
- b) The Ministry will not know the degree and speed of change that can occur in the various rivers and lakes when a mill has shut down and, consequently,
- c) will not have a benchmark to compare any pollution abatement program to (other than being less than the present pollution level).
- d) The Ministry will not be in a fully knowledgeable position in its abatement negotiations with the mills. If it knew the degree of change and the direct effects on the downstream portion then it would be in a better position to force its points.

Ironically, the only mill in the Province of Ontario that is shut down at the time of writing is the Reed Paper Company mill in Dryden and there will never be enough written about the effects of it's effluent on the environment.

The time has passed for getting the information that could have been used to better our environment-----it's a bloody shame!

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