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NEWS RELEASE

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POLLUTION PROBE REBUTTS

NEW US NIAGARA RIVER CLEAN UP PLAN

Toronto - In a meeting with Canadian Environment Minister Tom McMillan, the head of the US EPA, Lee Thomas, offered his countries plan of action to clean up the Niagara River. "There is nothing new in this proposal," said Kai Millyard, researcher at Pollution Probe in Toronto. "It is simply a status report on the EPA's inadequate activities".

Most disturbing to Pollution Probe was Mr. Thomas' ruling out excavation and destruction as a solution to the leaking chemical dumps along the edge of the Niagara River. Pollution Probe sent a telex (attached) to Mr. Thomas today suggesting that he has been "provided with incorrect information about the viability and safety of excavation".

Pollution Probe is inviting Mr. Thomas to attend the major conference they are sponsoring at the end of October in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Entitled PERMANENT SOLUTIONS: EXCAVATION AND TREATMENT OF HAZARDOUS WASTES, the conference will detail case histories of where successful excavation projects have been carried out.

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TEXT OF TELEX

18 October 1985

Mr. Lee Thomas
Administrator
US Environmental Protection Agency
401 "M" St S.W.
Washington, D.C.
USA 20460

Dear sir,

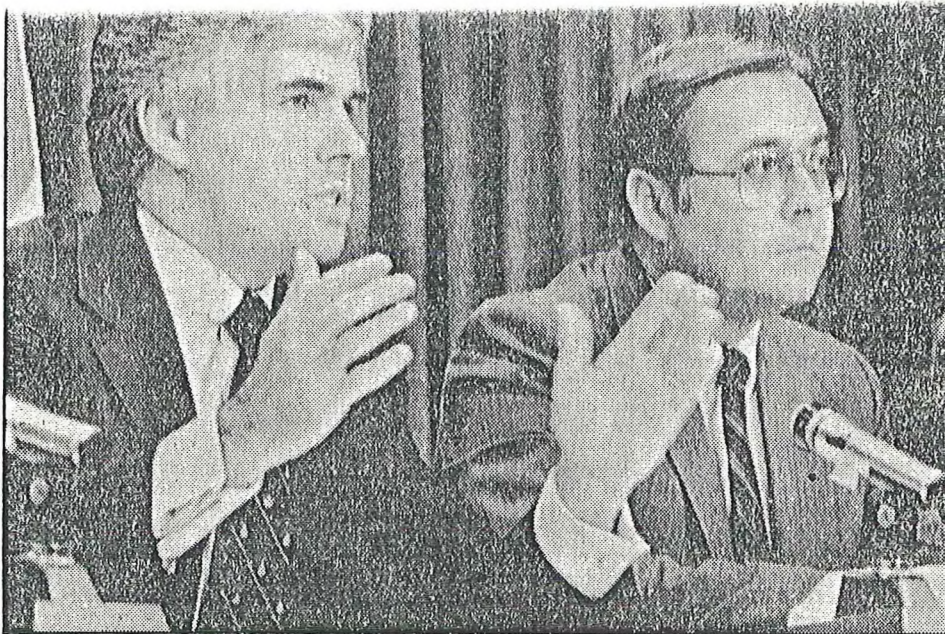
Pollution Probe notes with regret and dismay your comments yesterday ruling out the excavation of Niagara Frontier industrial waste landfills. We believe that you have been provided with incorrect information about the viability and safety of excavation.

From October 30 to November 1 Pollution Probe and the US Environmental Defence Fund are sponsoring a major technology transfer conference on the excavation and treatment of hazardous wastes. The conference, entitled PERMANENT SOLUTIONS, will be held in Niagara Falls, Ontario. The conference programme includes:

- A case study of the successfully completed excavation of 2 1/2 million gallons of pesticide waste sludge close to a residential community in Wisconsin.
- A case study of the successfully completed excavation of 1 million cubic yards of toxic waste from a Hooker Chemical site in Michigan.
- A presentation on excavation projects in the Netherlands.
- A presentation on a US EPA-negotiated and recently court-ordered excavation and destruction of six PCB sites in Indiana.
- A special session on the destruction of chemical wastes by high temperature incineration.
- A discussion on medical surveillance at excavation projects.
- Two special papers on the economics of excavation and incineration.

Our research and established engineering experience shows that excavation of toxic waste can be carried out in a secure manner. For the worst waste sites excavation is not only preferable to in situ measures, but is indispensable, and is the only option which can prevent inevitable long term leakage - leakage which threatens the safety of millions of unprotected people.

We would like to invite you to attend our conference and to see



Environment Minister Thomas McMillan, left, holds a news conference in Ottawa yesterday with Lee Thomas, head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Canadian Press

Project for Niagara cleanup could take '40, 50 years'

BY CHARLOTTE MONTGOMERY
The Globe and Mail
OTTAWA

A preliminary U.S. plan for dealing with Niagara River pollution might take decades to eliminate the danger of seepage from abandoned toxic chemical dumps that line the waterway.

Lee Thomas, head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said yesterday: "The cleanup of those sites will take years, the complete cleanup. You're talking . . . 20, 30, 40, 50 years."

Mr. Thomas said the plan he presented to Canadian Environment Minister Thomas McMillan proposes sealing off the area around the dumps, extracting chemical poisons from ground water contained there and incinerating the waste. Although Canada wants the buried chemicals removed rather than contained, Mr. Thomas said it is not possible simply to excavate the decades-old chemicals.

"From a public health and environmental view, it would be magnitudes more risky to propose that as a solution, to dig up and further expose a population to a goo of chemicals . . . while I extract and destroy (them) over a period of time," Mr. Thomas told reporters after a morning spent in private discussion with Mr. McMillan.

Mr. McMillan said he was "heartened" by the meeting but is reserving judgment on the U.S. plan until he has had time to examine it. The minister said he has pressed U.S. officials for a timetable to clean up the dump sites, which have been under discussion for years.

Mr. McMillan said Canada continues to believe the long-term solution for the dumps on the U.S. side of the river does not lie in containing the waste. This is like trying to hold "Jell-O in a sieve," he said.

But the minister played down the differences between the Canadian and U.S. view, saying the problem will cost billions of dollars to solve.

Later, in the House of Commons, he responded to questions from opposition MPs, saying: "There can be no doubt about the position of the Department of the Environment

and that of the Government of Canada. Our preferred option is for cleanup, for extraction and elimination of the offending toxins. It is not simply to contain. . . . Our position will not change on the subject."

Kai Millyard, a spokesman for Pollution Probe in Toronto, said last night that Mr. Thomas' plan contains virtually nothing new.

"There are no new measures for dealing with industrial point sources or for dealing with the dump sites," he said. "As for ruling out the excavation of dump sites, he doesn't know what he's talking about. The EPA doesn't have an excavation research program."

Many sites in the United States and in Europe have been successfully excavated, Mr. Millyard said. Pollution Probe is sponsoring an international conference on the subject in Niagara Falls in two weeks.

"It's simply not true that these sites cannot or should not be excavated," he said. "Containing the worst of these sites just doesn't work."

Department officials said later the process to which Mr. Thomas was referring involves containing the dump, drilling wells to pump out contaminated ground water, filter-

ing the chemicals from the water for incineration, and then returning the water to the ground. This continues until the contamination level in the water is considered acceptable. Ideally, there should be no leakage of chemicals beyond the site during the process.

Opposition environment critics were not impressed with what they heard of the plan. New Democrat William Blaikie said while he might welcome some of its measures, they amount to "no big deal" without a more speedy cleanup at four notorious dump sites on the waterway.

Liberal Charles Caccia, a former environment minister, said the extraction of chemicals from ground water, as he understands the process, would not guarantee the containment of toxic wastes at the dump site.

To accept such a plan, he said, is to say "some toxicity is okay, that it is good for six million citizens, Canadian and American, to rely on water that has been partially contaminated."

The Niagara River is the source of drinking water for about four million Canadians and 1.7 million Americans.

Mr. Caccia said he agrees excavation would be expensive, but it is no more costly than the construction of a Trident submarine, and the reluctance to spend such sums indicates the U.S. Government's priorities.

Mr. Thomas said he wants Canadian comment on the U.S. plan, which includes strong enforcement of restrictions on chemical discharge into the river; pre-treatment of toxic chemicals from industries in six municipalities on the U.S. side of the river; joint Canadian-U.S. research on how to burn off toxic wastes; joint monitoring of chemicals in the water; a study of storm-water runoff from industrial sites on the river; and the appointment by the United States of a project manager with control over the Niagara River efforts who will have access to top officials.

He said he hopes the plan will be in final form by the end of the year.