



CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY

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PROGRAM FOR ZERO DISCHARGE

PROJECT SUMMARY

In January 1988 the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) (formerly the Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation), released a report Zero Discharge: A Strategy for the Regulation of Toxic Substances in the Great Lakes Ecosystem. This report documented the failure of regulatory actions taken in Canada and the United States since 1978 to achieve the principal objective of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement - that of virtual elimination of persistent toxic substances entering the ecosystem. Key reasons were identified. Current laws, policies and standards are based on managing toxic waste rather than reducing absolutely the total loadings of pollutants into the environment. Radical changes are required to the existing regulatory and institutional framework in the Great Lakes basin if "zero discharge" is to become a reality.

Now a major bi-national research initiative has been launched to assist all basin jurisdictions to work toward the commitments of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The project, co-ordinated by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy and co-researched by the National Wildlife Federation, the Institute for Canada and the United States and Great Lakes United will document in all 12 Great Lakes jurisdictions the regulatory and institutional reforms necessary to achieve the goals of the Agreement.

The study has four major components:

1. In order to participate effectively in the formal review every three years of the Great Lakes water quality standards in each jurisdiction, the National Wildlife Federation will develop very specific model ("ideal") water quality standards which will fully implement the commitments under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement;

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Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy
Program for zero discharge project summary

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2. Next, the project will further a new generation of environmental standards for the basin. These are source reduction standards and regulations which prevent the creation of toxic by-products, residues and wastes. Only by moving away from managing toxic substances to eliminating them through "source reduction" standards, can the goals of zero discharge be achieved. CIELAP will be undertaking this research.

3. A rethinking of the institutional framework that administers and oversees the development and implementation of environmental standards is necessary if the reforms described above are to be effected. This component of the study, to be undertaken by the Institute for Canada and the United States (ICUS), will examine current institutional structures and provide some useful recommendations to resolve such key issues as the fragmentation of programs and activities throughout the basin and the need to incorporate a cross media approach to environmental management rather than the current sectoral approach such as the land, air and water branches of environmental agencies.

4. A public awareness campaign to ensure full participation in the project by government, industry and the public is a major part of the project. To assist in explaining the model WQS and source reduction regulations, a Citizens' Handbook will be prepared by Great Lakes United (GLU), which will guide the public to an understanding of the water quality standards, the review process and how to work toward the adoption of the model standards described above in each jurisdiction.

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