

EVALUATING RISKS TO HUMAN HEALTH ASSOCIATED WITH EXPOSURE TO TOXIC CHEMICALS IN THE GREAT LAKES BASIN ECOSYSTEM

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK

The intent of the Public Participation component of this project is to invite public input regarding their concerns and perspectives on the issues that emerge from scientific discussion as well as bringing forth those issues that may be overlooked during the scientific/technical aspects of the project. The tasks to be completed during this phase of the project are three-fold:

1. to transform the conclusions and recommendations from the scientific activities of this project into materials for public reading,
2. to seek public input on this information through a two-day conference, and
3. to develop documentary video tapes on the highlights of this project for public use which would include materials on risk assessment as well as general findings and conclusions drawn from project activities.

TASK ONE

Several publications are planned from this project on EVALUATING RISKS TO HUMAN HEALTH ASSOCIATED WITH EXPOSURE TO TOXIC CHEMICALS IN THE GREAT LAKES BASIN ECOSYSTEM. The pre-conference Briefing Book for the 1989 International Working Conference, which was developed from the April 1989 Disciplinary Workshop, will be the first document published during the project. The Task Group Reports of the October 1989 International Working Conference which detail the recommendations on needed policy changes, information gaps, and future research strategies will be developed into an Executive Summary of the Conference Proceedings and published immediately following the October Conference. The Executive Summary will be developed primarily to get the summary results and recommendations to governmental agencies and the public in both Canada and the U.S. in a timely fashion.

We will seek input regarding the public's view of important issues on this subject with the aid of public information dissemination groups, such as the Center for the Great Lakes and Great Lakes United. These special interest groups will be consulted during our editing of the Briefing Book and asked to edit the scientific book into a form that is able to be read by the public. We will also ask these special interest groups to do the same task with the products of the 1989 International Working Conference.

TASK TWO

Within two months after the completion of the International Working Conference, in conjunction with the above identified special interest groups, we will plan and host a Two-day Public Participation Conference in order to seek public input to the process of evaluating risks to human health associated with exposure to toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes basin. Attendance at the Public Participation Conference is expected to exceed 300 citizens in the western New York and southern Ontario region. The Conference will be held in Niagara Falls, New York, which is centrally located to the above geographic area. The Conference will begin with a Plenary Session that will appriase participants of the project on scientific results and conclusions to-date. During this opening plenary session there will also be keynote addresses scheduled on the subject. Tentatively, we are going to invite the administrators of the U.S. EPA and Environment Canada respectively, to give these keynote addresses.

Following the briefing by the facilitators of the various work groups from the April 1989 Disciplinary Workshop and the October 1989 International Working Conference, participants will select breakout groups that are designed to allow individual discussion on various issues related to the project scientific findings. For example, economists must assess impacts of regulations and constraints placed upon populations and cultures. Therefore, one of the work groups will discuss the policies that were recommended from the scientific/technical aspects of the project and evaluate their impact on economic concerns of the participants. Another work group will analyze the status of risk assessment on this subject. This group will consider whether risk assessment information really works and determine how it is interpreted by the public.

Because proof of harm is required to develop the appropriate public policy to protect the public against potential health problems from toxic chemical exposure, there is a need for evidence of harm. Another work group at the Public Participation Conference will consider this dilemma and discuss means of developing better documentation for evidence of harm to the public from exposure to toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes Basin.

Toxic chemical effects on human health are a question of interpretation. Human health is impacted in a number of ways, such as biomedically and psychosocially. There are truly social issues for this topic that go beyond purely scientific or policy issues. Therefore, another work group of the Conference will evaluate society's reaction to toxic chemical problems in terms of how humans are affected (medically or psychologically), which groups are affected differentially, and what the issues of concern are for these different groups. Social scientists at the Conference will work with this group to identify alternative strategies that might be implemented to reduce chemicals in the environment, besides the usual approach of regulation at the source. For example, input from this group might bring a clearer understanding to the project process on why chemicals are produced in the first place and how we can facilitate societal change through creation of social action that will reduce the need for these chemicals.

The Closing Plenary Session of the Public Participation Conference will be the forum to present the highlights of the various work group discussions to