



CHIEFS AND COUNCILS SAUGEEN OJIBWAY NATION

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Scientific data from Owen Sound Harbour confirms high pollution levels

New data from environmental researchers at Trent University verifies extremely high concentrations of carcinogenic (cancer-causing) pollution in the Owen Sound Harbour. Toxin levels in the sediment are similar to the infamous Hamilton Harbour.

Since 2008, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) has been involved in discussions with Transport Canada regarding the proposed divestiture of Owen Sound Harbour. Transport Canada, which owns the harbour, has been trying to sell (or divest) it since 2000. SON reached an agreement related to the divestiture with the City of Owen Sound in 2008, but Transport Canada rejected the proposal. Since then, divestiture has been attempted twice, once in 2010 and again in 2016.

Dillon Consulting was hired by Transport Canada in 2010 to perform an environmental assessment on the harbour, looking at the amount of and environmental risks presented by the pollution. The report concluded that there is significant contamination within the harbour, including high concentrations of toxins such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), mercury and lead.

PAHs are chemicals that occur naturally in coal, crude oil and diesel fuel. They are also produced when coal, oil, diesel fuel, wood, garbage and tobacco are burned. Many PAHs are carcinogenic and linger in sediment for long periods of time.

Starting in 2015, Trent University followed up the Dillon report with an investigation in partnership with SON. Very high levels of PAHs in the sediment were confirmed with no sign of lessening concentrations up to 25 cm - the depth sediment cores were taken from. Levels were found to be similar to other Areas of Concern in the Great Lakes, such as Randle Reef and parts of the St. Mary's River. As well, PAH concentrations in the harbour's water exceeded Ontario Water Quality Guidelines for the protection of aquatic life. Researchers are still unsure of the pollution's impact on local fish populations.

“We found concentrations of PAHs that are as high as some of the most polluted sites in the Hamilton Harbour,” said Trent University researcher Mary-Claire Buell in a statement to SON, “Our research is ongoing, however, based on what we have already learned, we feel it is important the public know what is in the Owen Sound Harbour.”

Impacts to human and environmental health remain unknown. In other Great Lakes areas with similar PAH pollution, ongoing efforts are made to communicate the risk to the public, in concert with monitoring programs to ensure the pollution isn't accumulating in fish. As well, remediation to improve lake health and reduce human exposure is often encouraged. None of these mitigation strategies are presently taking place in the Owen Sound Harbour.

“What's frustrating is that Transport Canada has resisted all attempts for a meaningful process to address the serious potential impacts to our rights and the health of the water,” said Doran Ritchie, Land Use Planning Coordinator for the SON Environment Office, “Our concern is not just for our two communities: this is an issue that affects both human health and the health of the water. Everyone should be aware of the current situation and be very concerned for the future of the Owen Sound Harbour.”

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Collectively known as the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash First Nation make decisions about their shared Territory through the SON Joint Council. They engage with government and proponents about projects, decisions and conduct in their Traditional Territory that could affect their community's rights, culture, resources, land and water.

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Media Release Backgrounder

- In 2010 Dillion Consulting carried out an environmental assessment on behalf of Transport Canada to assess the amount and the risk of the alleged pollution in the inner harbour of Owen Sound Bay
- This report concluded that there is significant contamination within the inner harbour, including high concentrations of known carcinogens (cancer causing pollution), Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) as well as mercury and lead. However, little effort has been made to inform the public of this issue.
- Toxicology Researchers from Trent University, in partnership with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, did a follow up investigation over the last 3 years to improve our understanding of this pollution. Trent University confirmed that there are incredibly high concentrations of PAHs in the inner harbour. The levels of PAHs are similar to other Areas of Concern in the Great Lakes such as Hamilton Harbour and St. Mary's River. They also used sediment cores to show that the pollution is both on the surface and below. How deep this pollution goes is still unknown, as the pollution extended deeper than the cores that were retrieved, with no sign of declining concentrations.
- Trent University also demonstrated that the PAHs are not just in the sediments but also in the water in Owen Sound Bay inner harbour. The estimated concentrations in the water exceed the Ontario Water Quality Guidelines for the protection of aquatic life.
- These conclusions are significant as the impacts to environmental and human health remain unknown. In other areas of the Great Lakes that have these large amounts of PAHs we see on-going efforts to understand and communicate the risks of such pollution to the public, monitoring programs to ensure these pollutants aren't accumulating in fish and remediation projects to improve lake health and reduce human exposure. Our concern is that none of this is happening in Owen Sound Bay, as no efforts have been made to protect its users and the rest of the ecosystem. In fact, this problem is largely being ignored by Transport Canada who is currently responsible for the Harbour.

Some potential Quotes:

"We found concentrations of PAHs, that are as high as some of the most polluted sites in Hamilton Harbour"

"Our research is on-going however based on what we have already learned, we feel it is important the public know about what is in Owen Sound Harbour."

Descriptions:

- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are chemicals that occur naturally in coal, crude oil, and diesel fuel. They also are produced when coal, oil, diesel fuel, wood, garbage and tobacco are burned.
- Health effects- many PAHs are cancer-causing chemicals
- Persist in sediments for long periods of time

I also threw a slide from my presentation to fisheries council below- it has actual concentrations on it in case you want specific numbers....

