

Substitute for House Resolution No. 129

A resolution calling for environmental officials of Canada, the United States, Michigan, and Ontario to develop stronger safeguards for notifications when spills of toxic materials occur.

Whereas, Over the years, Michigan and Ontario have developed procedures to provide notification when spills of harmful material take place that could impact people living across the border. Recent events along the St. Clair River have called into serious question the effectiveness of those procedures; and

Whereas, During the August 14th electricity power failure, hundreds of pounds of vinyl chloride were accidentally released into the river by an Ontario plastics company. This highly dangerous substance, which may cause liver and other cancers, was released over a three-day period. By the day after the power failure, August 15th, people in Michigan living along the river were already exhibiting significant symptoms of illness, apparently from drinking water contaminated by the vinyl chloride; and

Whereas, In spite of the notification procedures that were established to prevent such problems, notification to citizens in the affected area was not made until August 19th. Clearly, the system in place failed; and

Whereas, Concerns over how to deal with toxic spills have been articulated before. The Great Lakes Conservation Task Force specifically took note of inconsistencies within the Great Lakes basin and called for binational efforts to better coordinate approaches to contamination through the use of uniform thresholds, better detection technology, and a stronger partnership; and

Whereas, It is incumbent upon Michigan and Ontario environmental officials to reexamine policies that have proven to be ineffective and to modify procedures to ensure a better response to a spill of harmful materials; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives, That we urge the Canadian Minister of the Environment, the United States Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, the U. S. Coast Guard, and Michigan and Ontario environmental officials to develop stronger safeguards for notifications when spills of toxic materials occur; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Canadian Minister of the Environment, Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, Michigan State Police Emergency Management Division, Office of the Great Lakes, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, and Ontario Ministry of the Environment.

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