

WATER POLLUTION: A MICHIGAN CASE STUDY

Water is essential to life- true or false? The answer may seem to be a resounding “true”, but it is, in fact, false. The statement is missing one key piece of information. It should read - *clean* water is essential to life. Indeed, we take the fact that our water is delivered to us clean very much for granted. Consequently, we forget that our actions affect the environment and that our current consumer practices are very much in danger of contaminating water sources. Unfortunately, these detrimental environmental effects are occurring across the country.

At the 39th Annual Conference of the Water Pollution Control Federation, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water Pollution Control, Frank Diluzio, stated “...water pollution control has emerged as a matter of major national policy...because in point of cold hard fact, for the country as a whole, the war on water pollution is not going well.”¹ Almost fifty years later, this statement still holds true. While some may point to progress, the overwhelming fact of the matter is that the war on water pollution is not yet over.

To get a sense of this ongoing struggle one may look to the water pollution efforts in the Great Lakes region. Water pollution in the Great Lakes has been cause for significant concern, as these bodies are major sources of fresh water. There have been pollution control efforts enacted, but there is evidence that these efforts are slow moving.² Furthermore, the Great Lakes are not the only water pollution problem facing the Midwest. The state of Michigan alone contains a number of government clean-up sites.³ In fact, pollution from these sites could pose more of an immediate threat to the environment and people’s health, especially for Michigan residents. At the very least, these sites deserve more attention and research regarding the detrimental effects resulting from water contamination in the surrounding area.

The current research, therefore, seeks to investigate a more specific water pollution problem within the state of Michigan. The area of focus for this research will be the Velsicol Chemical Corporation Superfund site near the Pine River in St. Louis, Michigan. Velsicol Chemical (formerly Michigan Chemical) was responsible for dumping thousands of tons of the harmful chemical DDT into the Pine River.⁴ At one point, the Pine River had the highest

¹ Frank C. Di Luzio, “Water Pollution Control: An American Must,” *Journal (Water Pollution Control Federation)* 39, no. 1 (1967): 2.

² Tom Henry, “Give DTE Energy props, but Great Lakes pollution control is agonizingly slow,” *Great Lakes Echo*, June 23, 2011, <http://greatlakesecho.org/2011/06/23/give-dte-energy-props-but-great-lakes-pollution-control-is-agonizingly-slow/>.

³ “Region 5 Cleanup Sites,” *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*, February 11, 2014, <http://www.epa.gov/region5/cleanup/index.htm#MI>.

⁴ “About Us,” *Pine River Superfund Citizen Task Force*, February 2, 2014, <http://pinerivercag.org/node/3>.

recorded DDT levels in the United States.⁵ Not surprisingly, the contamination has had profound adverse effects on the environment, as well as poses a health risk to nearby residents.⁶

The purpose of the current research is to track the environmental developments near the St. Louis Superfund site and to explore the extent of the damage caused by the industrial waste left behind. Not only is there the possibility that this case study could provide valuable environmental information regarding this site, but it will also contribute to the growing body of research on water contamination in the U.S. Most importantly, there is the hope that this research will spread awareness of the dangers of current industrial disposal practices and environmental issues in general. The war on water pollution surely demands the cooperation of the American people. For this reason, awareness is key.

Bibliography

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edward C. Lorenz, *Civic Empowerment In An Age of Corporate Greed* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2012, 220-221