

PRÉCIS

THE SIERRA LEGAL DEFENCE FUND'S NATIONAL SEWAGE REPORT CARD III

The Sierra Legal Defence Fund publishes a regular report card on sewage treatment in Canada's cities in September. The first edition, published in 1994, evaluated twenty Canadian cities based on the quality of their sewage treatment as determined by various criteria. The report was updated in 1999 when twenty-one cities were evaluated. Both reports revealed that, although there had been substantial progress in some cities over the past decade, questionable practices and outright violations continued in many others.

The 2004 version of the report card was released last month. It compares 22 Canadian cities in terms of the quality of their sewage treatment and assigns each a letter grade between A and F. The main criteria for these evaluations are the level of sewage treatment provided, the volume of raw sewage discharged and compliance with permits and regulations. Consideration is also given to the method of disinfection of effluent before entering receiving water, methods of sludge disposal and the prevalence of combined sewer overflows.

The 2004 report card shows that of the 22 cities examined, 14 have made progress since the 1999 evaluation, 4 have made no discernable progress, 3 have regressed and the city of Victoria was suspended from the assessment.

More specifically, five cities (Victoria, Saint John, Halifax, St. John's and Dawson City) continue to dump some or all of their sewage, raw and untreated, directly into Canada's rivers, lakes and oceans – a total of 140 billion litres per year. Three other cities (Vancouver, Montreal, and Charlottetown) discharge some or all of their sewage with only primary treatment (e.g. settling and skimming off of large debris). Together, these 8 cities generate more than 3.0 billion litres of sewage effluent per day - nearly 40,000 litres every second. All of it is discharged with no or only minimal treatment.

The city of Victoria, which received a failing grade in the 1999 report card, was suspended from this year's assessment. It is the only city in Canada that still discharges all of its sewage raw and, according to the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, has taken no significant steps over the past decade to improve its sewage treatment process.

Calgary, on the other hand, is the only city to receive a grade of A+, improving on its 1999 A grade. Since 1999, Calgary has added UV disinfection to 100% of its tertiary treated sewage and plans are in the works for a third state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant. Calgary's treated wastewater also undergoes regular toxicity testing.

For the full report see: http://www.sierralegal.org/reports/sewage_report_card_III.pdf.