

Study says Ontario water isn't properly monitored

TORONTO — The government of Ontario has cut back on the testing and monitoring of lakes and rivers, but the pollutants contaminating them have more than doubled, a new study says.

The findings of the study show environmental issues are not a priority for the government, said York University Professor of Environmental Studies Lewis Molot, one of its authors, the *Toronto Star* reported today, 18 December.

The \$20,000 study, "Liquid Assets: Monitoring Water Quality in Ontario," was conducted by York University and the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy through funding from the federal government and charitable donations, the newspaper said.

Molot said there is no evidence of routine chemical monitoring of toxic organic contaminants in inland water and there is no proof the situation is getting any better, even after the Walkerton tragedy where seven people died and more than 2,300 were seriously ill from drinking water contaminated by a deadly strain of *E. coli* bacteria, the newspaper reported.

The study, Molot told the newspaper, concludes that Ontario is unable to assess the over-all quality of inland waters that flow into the Great Lakes. He said the monitoring is necessary to determine whether Ontario's environmental policies are effective.

An environment ministry spokesperson said the report doesn't give the total picture, the newspaper said. The official dismissed the findings as being based on old data, and noted that a recent federal study found less contamination in surface water.

Since coming to power, the Tory government has cut staff at the environment ministry by more than 50 percent — or more than 1,400 people — and cut the budget by 44 percent, the *Toronto Star* said. Many of the positions were front-line inspectors.

The article stated that most of the information for the study could only be obtained through Freedom of Information requests and Molot said the government has not released any surface-water quality reports in over 10 years.

Molot told the newspaper the two-year study revealed, among other things, that pollutants discharged to Ontario surface water either directly or through spills and leaks were reported at about 12,000 tons in 1999, compared to 5,000 tons four years earlier. Also, since 1995, surface water monitoring stations were slashed from 730 to some 240.