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A report released today says Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. in Flin Flon, Man., is one of the worst air polluters in North America.

You can't breathe easy in the city

At least a dozen industries around island are cited for heavy emissions of lead

MICHELLE LALONDE
THE GAZETTE

Quebec is home to some of the worst air polluters when it comes to lead, a suspected carcinogen that can also cause such neurological impairments as seizures, mental retardation and behavioural disorders. Noranda Inc.'s Horne Smelter in Rouyn-Noranda ranked second across North America for lead releases into the air in a report to be made public today by the Commission for Environmental Co-operation of North America.

Lead particles are relatively heavy, and do not travel as far by air as some pollutants. But Montrealers may be concerned about at least a dozen industrial facilities on or near the island that release lead and its compounds into the air.

According to the Canada's National Pollutant Release Inventory, a publicly accessible inventory of industrial pollution, 11,198 kilograms of lead were released into the air by industries in the major Montreal area in 2003, the most recent year reported.

The worst offender in the Montreal area is Nova PB Inc., a lead recycling facility in the South Shore community of Ste. Catherine, which reportedly released 6,600 kilograms of lead and its compounds that year. On the island, the worst air polluters when it comes to lead were: Noranda Inc.'s Affinerie CCR in Montreal East (831 kilograms), GELcore in Lachine (51 kilograms), Shell Canada's Montreal East refinery (58 kilograms) and Petro-Canada's refinery on Sherbrooke St. E. (48 kilograms).

Does this mean Montrealers are breathing in lead? "The quick and short answer is yes," said Bill Kennedy, executive director of the CEC. "Lead is always touted as an environmental success story because 10 to 15 years ago, governments moved to remove lead from gasoline."

"But this report shows that lead is still out there, but it's coming mostly from smelters and public utilities." The United States regulates

lead emission levels in its Clean Air Act, Kennedy noted, while Canada does not have comparable legislation.

Those living near a facility that releases lead and its compounds into the air are at greatest risk from lead that settles into dust and dirt, said Kathleen Cooper, a senior researcher who specializes in lead issues at the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

"I would expect to find elevated levels of lead in soil, street dust and house dust in the 10 to 50 city blocks surrounding those facilities in the direction of the prevailing winds," Cooper said. "There is no safe level of lead exposure," she added.

"It adheres to particulate matter in smog, so we do breathe it in, but the major pathway is dust and dirt. ... The most at-risk group is children because of their hand-to-mouth behaviour, and also because their digestive systems absorb 50 per cent of the lead they are exposed to, whereas adults will absorb only 10 per cent. The exception is pregnant women, whose systems absorb lead at the same high rate as children."

She noted that lead interferes with normal brain development and can lead to deficiencies in IQ.

She criticized Canada's response to lead pollution. Canada only recently passed a law restricting lead in paint to 600 parts per million, something the United States did 29 years ago. "The U.S. takes lead contamination much more seriously than we do," she said.

There are no Canada-wide lead emission standards for base metal smelters. The federal government is working on a policy, which would require an amendment to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. This would require a select number of facilities (including the major lead air releasers in Quebec) to meet certain emissions targets, though not on lead specifically.

You can get information on industrial polluters in your neighbourhood at this Web site: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/npi>

Lead still hangs heavy in air

Ontario, Quebec worst offenders

Poisonous metal was removed from gas, but smelters still spew it into atmosphere

MICHELLE LALONDE
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When Canada finally phased out leaded gasoline in the 1980s, Canadians might have thought they were safe from the cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm that lead exposure can cause.

But a report to be made public today by the Commission for Environmental Co-operation of North America shows Canadian industrial facilities are releasing lead into the air at an alarming rate, especially in Ontario and Quebec.

In fact, Ontario and Quebec industries released more lead into the air in 2002 than any other jurisdictions tracked in the report, including all of the U.S. states.

Ontario topped the chart at 145,000 kilograms, while Quebec was not far behind at 127,194 kilograms, followed by Manitoba in third place with 112,016 kilo-

grams. Missouri ran a distant fourth at 90,637 kilograms.

Canada is home to the two worst air polluters in North America in terms of lead emissions, the report reveals. Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. in Flin Flon, Man., was the worst offender, reporting 110,000 kilograms of air releases of lead and its compounds. A close second was Horne Smelter in Rouyn-Noranda, with almost 104,000 kilograms of lead releases into the air.

Lead is a persistent, toxic metal that accumulates in the blood, bones and soft tissues and can cause developmental damage, especially in children. Even in small doses, lead exposure has been associated with nervous-system damage in fetuses and young children, resulting in learning deficits and lowered IQ.

The report, titled Taking Stock, is an annual analysis of

industrial pollution in the United States and Canada produced by the CEC, a Montreal-based international organization created under the North American Free Trade Agreement. The study is based on information reported for the year 2002, the most recently available comparable data.

The report looks at 203 different toxic chemicals released by

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CEC's Bill Kennedy

industrial facilities in Canada and the United States.

In 2002, 1.5 million tonnes of chemicals were reported released in North America, and 10 per cent of these were known or suspected carcinogens.

"The good news is pollution levels across North America are decreasing overall and some of the big carcinogens are decreasing even faster," said Bill

Kennedy, executive director of the CEC.

Overall, the amount of toxic chemicals released into the air, water or ground went down by 11 per cent over the past five years. The amount of known or suspected carcinogens that were tracked declined by 26 per cent between 1998 and 2002.

"At the same time, some developmental toxicants are increasing - and lead is at the top of the list," Kennedy said.

The report shines a light on lead this year because both Canada and the United States recently lowered the threshold at which point industrial facilities must report lead releases.

In the past, facilities only had to report yearly lead emissions if they exceeded 10,000 kilograms.

Now, because governments are recognizing how harmful lead exposure is to humans, companies must report emissions of 50 kilograms or more. This made for a much clearer picture of how much lead is being released into the environment.

mlalonde@thegazette.canwest.com