



News Release

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Environmental Approval Process Not Effective in Regulating Polluters: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Weaknesses in the government's environmental approvals process pose risks to the environment and the health of Ontarians from polluting activities, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2016 Annual Report*.

"The Province has not been proactive in regulating emitters," Lysyk said today after the Report was tabled in the Legislature. "We found that the majority of emitters have not been inspected as they should be, and that the penalties levied against non-compliant emitters have not been significant enough to act as a deterrent and prevent them from polluting again."

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (Ministry) administers the Environmental Approvals program, which is intended to protect the public and the environment by regulating polluting activities.

The program does this by issuing approvals to organizations to regulate their emissions. The audit found that although air quality in Ontario has improved in the past 10 years, southern Ontario still ranked among the highest in Canada in 2013 for emissions of sulphur dioxide and fine particulate matter, both known to cause respiratory problems.

About 80% of emitters that have received approvals in the last 15 years have never been inspected by the Ministry, which has minimal information about the risks they pose to the environment and human health. It assumes that they pose minimal risk—but has no evidence to support this assumption.

Ministry inspections of the other 20% of emitters over the last five years found that, on average, between 20% and 47% were violating the conditions of their approvals—thus indicating a need for more frequent inspections. Enforcement actions taken by the Ministry often did not deter repeat offences.

Other significant findings in the Report include:

- Significant numbers of emitters across Ontario may be operating without proper environmental approvals. Instead of proactively identifying these emitters, the Ministry relies largely on public complaints to identify emitters operating without environmental approvals.
- Over 200,000 approvals issued more than 15 years ago are not monitored by the Ministry and have not been updated to reflect current emitter activities. The Ministry does not even know how many of these emitters are still operating.
- The Ministry does not require financial security for future clean-up of contamination and environmental damage from many emitters involved in high-risk activities.
- Fees paid by emitters cover only 20% of the \$23-million cost to administer the program, before enforcement and compliance expenditures of approximately \$100 million are considered.

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