



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ontario Pays Millions Managing Hazardous Spills, Doesn't Bill Polluters: Auditor General

(TORONTO) There were more than 73,000 hazardous spills reported in Ontario between 2011 and 2020, but the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks attempted to recover its response costs just three times. Even in those three, it went after only about half of the \$1.3 million spill response cost it incurred, said Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk, in her *Annual Report of Environment Audits*. When looking at just 30 other spills where the government did not attempt any cost-recovery, the audit report estimated those spill responses cost taxpayers, and not polluters, about \$4.5 million. The total amount of unrecovered costs is potentially tens of millions of dollars more.

“The Ministry of the Environment can do more to encourage spillers to prevent and reduce the risks from spills, report spills promptly, and improve their response and clean-up practices,” said Lysyk. “If the Ministry does not improve on its compliance and enforcement, it is very likely that these spills will continue, with their related impacts on people and wildlife, and the air, land and water, of the province.”

A hazardous spill is a discharge of a substance to air, land or water that can pose a threat to human health and the environment. The responsibility for protecting Ontario's air, land and water falls to the Environment Ministry. It is responsible for ensuring regulated industries have plans in place to prevent and respond to hazardous spills, and that they comply with provincial rules. The Ministry is also responsible for overseeing spill response and clean-up, taking action when spillers fail to clean up, and recovering the costs it incurs.

The audit found that the Environment Ministry's work with industries that spill hazardous substances is too weak to prevent and reduce the risks from spills. It also found that information about these spills and potential impacts on nearby people, communities and the environment are not publicly disclosed in a transparent or timely way.

“Spills of hazardous substances can have serious impacts on human health and the environment – which means that reducing the risk of these spills and informing the public quickly when there are spills is critically important,” said Tyler Schulz, Assistant Auditor General and Commissioner of the Environment at the Office. “But the government is not living up to its *Environmental Protection Act* compliance and enforcement responsibilities to ensure that spillers report spills promptly, and that they reduce the risks and harmful impacts of these spills.”

This audit report includes 13 recommendations for improvement.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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