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## Drinking Water Quality Standards in Ontario - Are they Tough?

**Ontario government claims to have the “best and toughest clean water policies in the world”**

### **Report finds Ontario drinking water standards lacking**

(September 22, 2003 – Toronto) In a report released today by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) the Ontario government was criticized for not living up to its promises to protect water quality.

More than two years after the Walkerton tragedy, the report, titled *Drinking Water Quality Standards in Ontario - Are they Tough?*, examines the Ontario government's claim, made on October 2002 by Chris Stockwell, Minister of Environment, “that Ontario has and enforces the best and toughest clean water policies in the world.”

The report compares the Ontario drinking water quality standards and guidelines with those of the Canadian government, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). For more than half of the chemical limits examined, the Ontario provisions either did not exist (no limits to contamination) or had higher maximum levels than those in other jurisdictions.

“We know that the stated the intention of the government of Ontario is to address all the recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry,” said Anne Mitchell, Executive Director, CIELAP. “However, our careful analysis shows that it is premature to claim that Ontario has the best and toughest clean water policies in the world.”

“In one of the worst examples found in the report, the acceptable level of PCBs is six times higher in Ontario than is allowed in the United States,” said Satya Mohapatra, Research Associate, CIELAP. PCBs are known to cause skin changes, thymus gland problems, immune deficiencies, reproductive or nervous system difficulties and an increased risk of cancer.

CIELAP is calling on the Ontario government to ensure that:

- The Advisory Council for Drinking Water Standards should be formed as soon as possible as recommended in the Walkerton Inquiry Report. The scientific evidences, priorities and methodologies should be examined in detail to establish new tough standards in Ontario.
- The annual report of the Drinking Water Surveillance Program should be more

elaborate and include the ranges of concentration of all chemicals monitored with adequate interpretation. It should be available to the public on the Ministry's website.

- The Government in power should ensure that standards are in place before it claims that Ontario has achieved the toughest clean water standards in the world. It also needs to have established a completely reliable and transparent system throughout the province.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the report visit the web site [www.cielap.org](http://www.cielap.org) or call:

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*The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.*