

City Council of Chicago
Joint Committee on Energy and Parks – Hearing
City Hall, City Council Chambers
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Testimony of:
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Good morning Chairman Rugai and other members of the City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before your Committee today concerning the British Petroleum discharges to Lake Michigan.

Immediately upon learning that the State of Indiana and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency were going to allow British Petroleum to increase their pollution discharges to Lake Michigan, our organization was very concerned about the threats to the Great Lakes and the very dangerous precedent this would set. Mayors from the United States and Canada along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence understand that their cities have spent billions of dollars over the past thirty five years to improve their operations and reduce discharges to the waters and seriously question why a company like British Petroleum should be allowed to increase its pollution. Mayor Daley founded our organization in 2003 and has worked closely with mayors from nearly 100 member and participating cities to determine how they might be more directly involved in protecting and restoring the resource. We called an emergency meeting of our Board of Directors right after learning about the British Petroleum permit, and determined that prompt action was necessary. Our member cities from across the Basin have spoken out against the pollution increases, and some are considering and passing resolutions against the permit.

What British Petroleum is proposing to do is fundamentally flawed for three reasons. First, this would be a very significant increase in pollution to Lake Michigan, adding 54% more ammonia and 35% more solids, including mercury, lead, selenium, and other pollutants, than is allowed under a permit issued 17 years ago. This is in the face of 35 years of progress on the Great Lakes where lower and lower amounts of pollution have been discharged over the years.

Secondly, the permit allows British Petroleum to dilute its pollution in a mixing zone of over 3 million cubic feet of water in Lake Michigan where water quality standards can be violated. The Great Lakes are not meant to be pollution dilution facilities.

Third, the permit allows British Petroleum an exemption from the Anti-Degradation Policy on the basis of a demonstration that all technologically and

economically feasible measures were taken to avoid the increased pollution, and that the economic and social benefits to the area justify the increases. Apparently, British Petroleum claims it does not have the space to expand their wastewater treatment facility, which appears to be achieving only a 70% removal efficiency for ammonia at this time. Apparently, the economic and social implications for others on Lake Michigan are not taken into account.

I find it very difficult to believe that a company such as British Petroleum, which has earned more than \$62 billion in profits over the past three years, is the third most profitable company on the planet, and bills itself as a “green” petroleum company, does not have the technical and financial resources to solve this problem. Removal of ammonia and suspended solids from wastewater streams is well established in the industry, and should not be a problem for this company. The claim that there is not sufficient space for expanded treatment facilities at a plant of 1700 acres is very difficult to believe. According to one account, only 12,000 square feet of space would be required, which is a little over ¼ acre, on a plant site of 1700 acres. Looking at a Google Earth aerial photograph of the plant, it certainly appears that there is more than adequate space for expanded wastewater treatment facilities.

British Petroleum claims that what they discharge into Lake Michigan is more than 99.9 % water, and that there is no harm to drinking water or the environment. However, the State of Indiana fact sheet of March 2007 on the permit says, “The effluent from the wastewater treatment plant has demonstrated periodic toxicity.” In addition, it says, “The permit will contain a requirement to test the effluent for chronic toxicity...” after the new, increased pollution is being discharged. It goes on to say that if chronic toxicity is found, a toxic reduction evaluation will be required. This hardly inspires confidence that the increased pollution is safe for the people and their families who enjoy Lake Michigan.

We are at an absolutely critical time in the history of the Great Lakes. Will we allow British Petroleum to reverse 35 years of progress on the Great Lakes, or will we continue to advance toward a future where the largest body of surface fresh water in the world will help provide an unmatched quality of life and economic well being to over 40 million citizens from the United States and Canada. The resounding answer from United States and Canadian Mayors from across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence is that increased pollution will not be allowed, and we will continue to advance protection and restoration of the resource.