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Continuing Pollution Challenges One great challenge in the Great Lakes today is **non-point-source pollution**, or pollution that comes from many sources. One source, for example, is rainfall or snowmelt. Runoff—the water not absorbed by soil—travels over the ground, picking up **pollutants** from soil, and then into lakes and rivers. Runoff from storms also picks up waste from industrial and construction sites. Old toxic waste dumps also pollute since many contain poisons that leak into waterways. There are as many as 250 dumps on the shores of the Niagara River alone.

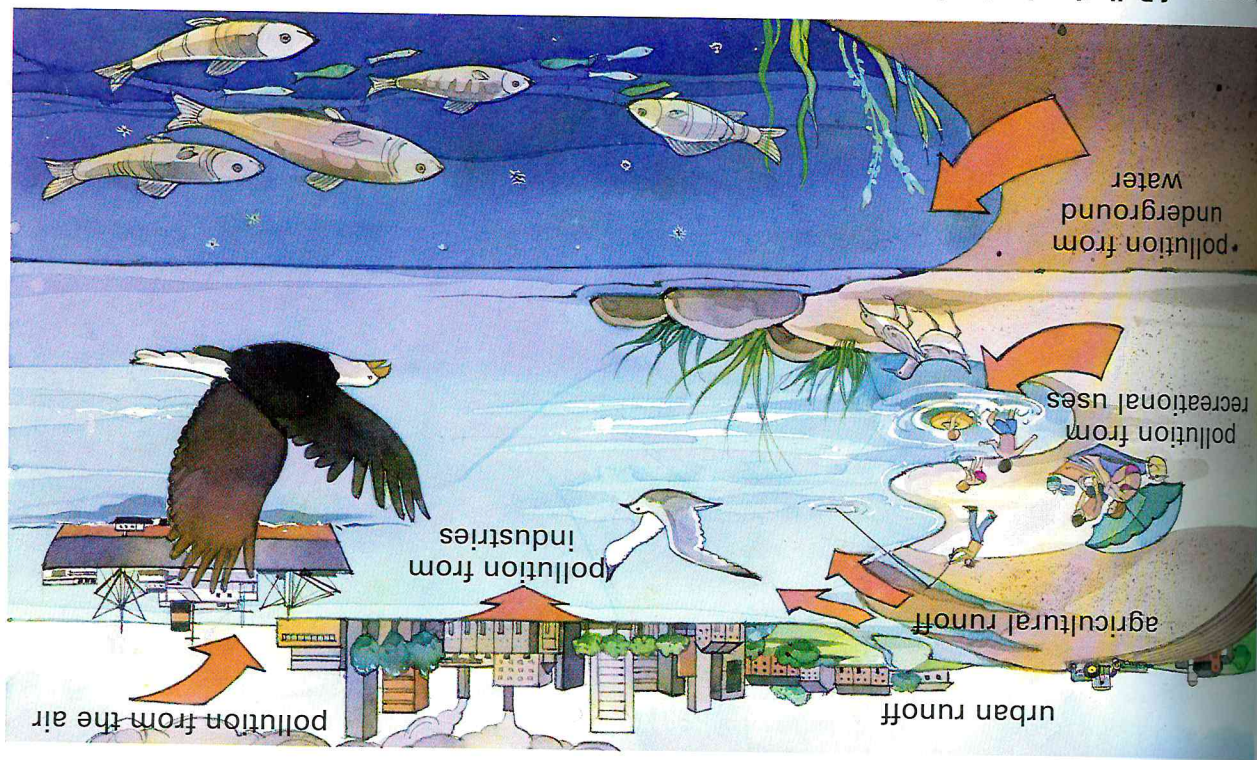
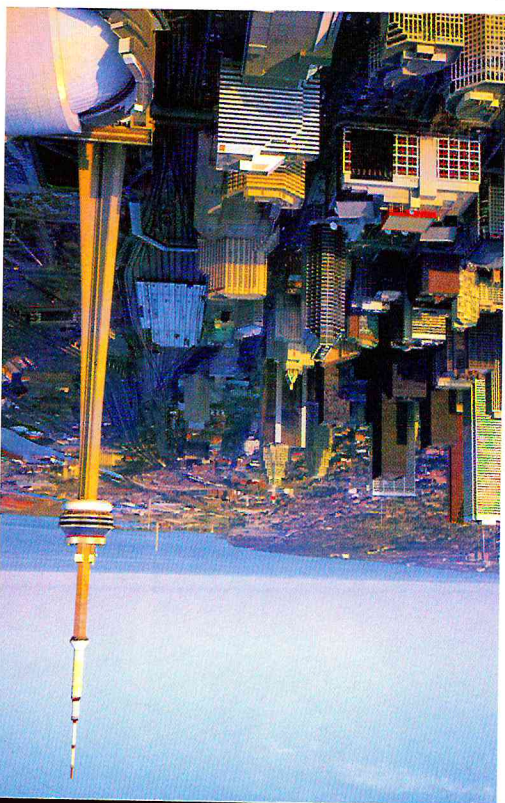
Pollution from the air damages watersheds as well. Mercury, among other things, is released into the air when coal is burned. This highly toxic metal falls back to Earth mixed with rain or as dust and then enters waterways and the food web.

Canada and the United States are working to clean up non-point-source pollution, and new laws have been passed to limit harmful chemicals in the air, water, and soil. The two nations are also working to clean up toxic **sediment**, or polluted soil that has settled at the bottom of lakes and rivers. Removing such sediment is both difficult and costly. Water flows so slowly out of most of the Great Lakes that pollutants entering the lakes are likely to stay. Lake Superior, the largest and deepest Great Lake, retains water for 170 years or longer.

The best way to deal with pollution is to prevent it. Today education programs encourage prevention. As a result, people in industry and farming are using fewer harmful chemicals, and consumers are choosing products that are safer for the environment.

The Toronto Skyline

Toronto lies on the shores of Lake Ontario. The Great Lakes provide drinking water for three fourths of Ontario's people.



This diagram shows several sources of pollution in the Great Lakes region. The United States and Canada have both passed laws to reduce pollution of the air, water, and soil.

Sources of Pollution in the Great Lakes