

## Timeline: Love Canal Hazardous Waste Disaster

1892

William T. Love proposed construction of a manmade canal that would ultimately link the Niagara River to Lake Ontario, providing water and hydroelectric power for the model industrial city.

1942

Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation began dumping chemical wastes at the Love Canal, and by 1952 had dumped nearly 22,000 tons of chemical waste into the canal.

1953

Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation sold the Love Canal property (approximately 15 acres) for \$1.00 to the Board of Education of Niagara Falls with a deed disclaimer of responsibility for any future damages due to the presence of buried chemicals.

1955

Board of Education of Niagara Falls completed construction on and opened the 99th Street Elementary School and sold unused sections of the Love Canal property to home developers to build residences.

1976–1977

The *Niagara Gazette* (and reporter Michael H. Brown) in a series of articles reported that chemical residues from the Love Canal landfill between 97th and 99th Streets have been seeping into the basements of homes in the area. These reports cited illnesses and injuries to residents and pets and destruction of plant life. The newspaper urged prompt government action.

1978

New York State Health Commissioner (Dr. Robert Whalen) began health studies of the Love Canal community (house-to-house collecting of blood samples, levels of toxic vapors, and medical exams and studies of residents) that subsequently confirmed that a serious public health hazard existed. New York Health Department officials met with Love Canal residents and explained the hazards of exposure to toxic chemicals in and around homes. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from its tests confirmed the existence of toxic vapors in home basements as a serious health threat to the Love Canal community.

In June, United States Pentagon officials denied any knowledge of records pertaining to possible disposal of US Army wastes at Love Canal.

In August, the New York State Health Commissioner declared a “State of Emergency at Love Canal” and ordered the closing of the 99th Street Elementary School and the evacuation and relocation of pregnant women and children under age two.

In August, President Jimmy Carter declared a “Federal State of Emergency” at Love Canal and provided funds (\$10 million dollars) to permanently relocate the 239 families that lived in the first

two rows of homes that encircled the Love Canal landfill site. The remaining residents who lived in the ten-block area were told that they were not at risk. These residents vehemently protested their exclusion from relocation.

### 1979

In January, a study by a cancer researcher, Dr. Beverly Paigen, revealed a high rate of birth defects and miscarriages among Love Canal families and recommended evacuation of more residents.

In February, a second evacuation order was issued by the New York State Health Department of 30 families with pregnant women and children under age two who lived in the ten-block area (between 97th and 103rd Streets) outside of the first evacuation zone of 239 homes.

In March, United States Senate and House of Representatives sub-committees convened hearings into the Love Canal environmental disaster.

In April, the US Environmental Protection Agency provided \$4 million dollars for remedial clean-up work at the Love Canal, and the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration provided \$1 million dollars in debt assistance to the city of Niagara Falls. In June, the New York State Legislature extended property exemptions, retroactive to 1978, to more than 300 families in the area of Love Canal.

In September, the New York State Health Department temporarily relocated 300 additional families who lived in the ten-block area because they began to experience health problems during the clean-up projects due to exposure to harmful chemicals.

By October, more than 800 lawsuits for punitive and compensatory damages have been filed against the Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation, Niagara County, the city of Niagara Falls, and the Board of Education of Niagara Falls.

In December, the United States Department of Justice filed a \$124 million dollar lawsuit against the Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation and its parent company, Occidental Chemical Corporation.

### 1980

In April, New York State filed a \$635 million dollar lawsuit against the Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation, Occidental Chemical Corporation, and the Occidental Petroleum Corporation, which claimed that they were responsible for the Love Canal environmental disaster.

In May, the EPA announced that blood-test results of Love Canal community revealed chromosome damage and a proclivity for cancers among a sampling of area residents. Angry Love Canal residents, led by Ms. Lois Gibbs, president of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, “detained” two EPA representatives for six hours and demanded that the federal government relocate all (approximately 900) families in the Love Canal neighborhoods. Within two days, the federal government agreed to this temporary relocation until funding became available for permanent housing.

In October, President Carter declared a “Second Federal State of Emergency” in the Love Canal area, and he traveled to Niagara Falls and signed a bill enacted by Congress, the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as the “Superfund” Act, which gave the federal government authority (through the EPA) to clean up

hazardous-waste sites (and then seek redress for the clean-up costs from the responsible parties) and provided support from a special trust fund to address environmental issues and clean up hazardous-waste sites, including the permanent relocation of all Love Canal residents.

### 1983

New York Supreme Court announced a \$20 million dollar settlement in favor of former and current Love Canal residents (about 1,330 families) with Occidental Chemical Corporation, a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum, and the establishment of a \$1 million dollar medical trust fund for the residents.

### 1984

The EPA and Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation reached a settlement on remediation of the Love Canal landfill and protection of drinking water from endangerment in the City of Niagara Falls. The agreement required Hooker to establish and execute detailed scientific protocols, engineering designs, construction plans, and quality-control procedures for containment, maintenance, monitoring, environmental health and safety of the Love Canal landfill and the city's drinking water. A thick plastic liner, new clay "cap," top soil, and high barbed-wire fence were installed over the most toxic (seven-acre) area of the Love Canal landfill.

### 1988

The New York State Health Department completed a five-year "Habitability Study" and concluded that areas and sections of the Love Canal site (beyond the barbed-wire fence) were "as habitable as other areas of Niagara Falls." A public organization, the Love Canal Revitalization Agency, rebuilt homes and renamed the area Black Creek Village. Nearly all of these renovated homes were privately sold during the 1990s. Some environmental groups and scientists have questioned and criticized this "Habitability Study."

### 1994

Occidental Chemical Corporation and Occidental Petroleum agree to a settlement of \$98 million dollars to reimburse New York State's clean-up costs of the Love Canal landfill site.

### 1995

Occidental Chemical Corporation and Occidental Petroleum agree to a settlement of \$129 million dollars to reimburse the federal government's clean-up costs of the Love Canal landfill site.

### 2004

The EPA announced that the major clean-up objectives had been achieved and the Love Canal landfill was removed from its Superfund list as a hazardous toxic-chemical site although some sections are still quarantined from public access and usage by a barbed-wire fence as a reminder of the Love Canal's landmark legacy as the first hazardous waste disposal incident of national significance, for it was not confined to the workplace but "hit people where they lived."