

Dow completes river clean-up

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By **GEORGE MATHEWSON**
The Observer

Dow Chemical Canada has finished its clean-up of the St. Clair River, signaling the end of a \$100-million, 20-year makeover that's transformed the local plant and its reputation.

"We're pretty proud," said project leader Catherine Creber. "This was the last one in a long list of projects we created for ourselves back in the '80s."

Dow was a corporation synonymous with mercury pollution and the infamous St. Clair River "blob" when it announced in the mid-1980s it had changed its ways.

Despite public skepticism, it set about cutting discharges and separating itself from the river. When that was done, it turned to cleaning up an old landfill, the Cole Drain and

other polluted sites.

The river remediation has taken three years and \$15 million. When a layer of clean sand and gravel is laid down next spring the river will be restored to its original state.

Dow used an industrial-strength vacuum cleaner to suck up sediment laced with decades-old contaminants lying downstream of the plant and transfer it to a holding pond on shore.

Initially, environmentalists feared an impact on drinking water. But the technology proved successful at removing sediment without stirring up deposits of perchloroethylene, carbon tetrachloride and other chemicals.

"It was certainly nice to show people we could do it," Creber said.

A spokesperson for Environment Minister Leona Dom-

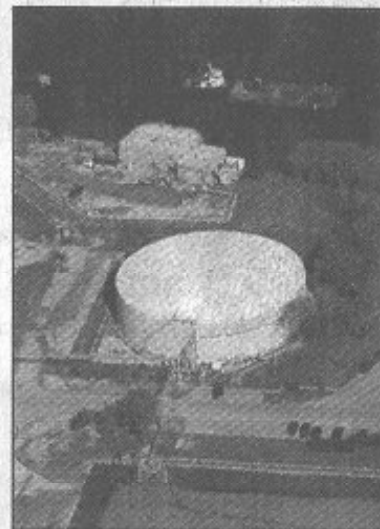
browsky praised the project, noting it should help the process of delisting the St. Clair as a toxic hotspot.

"This is very good news," Art Chamberlain said. "We've worked closely with them and applaud the effort to clean up the river and restore it to the condition it should be in."

This year, about 4,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel was brought to shore. Instead of landfilling it, like previous loads, Dow will use a biological process to destroy the contaminants on-site.

Straw and manure are being added and the entire "biocell" capped with clay. Over the next 10 to 15 years, bacteria will convert the chemicals into harmless compounds.

"It's like a giant backyard composter," Creber said. "More and more we're trying to use Mother Nature-assisted remediation."



Observer file photo

A tug and barge are seen in the St. Clair River off the Dow property during work to clean up contaminated sediment.