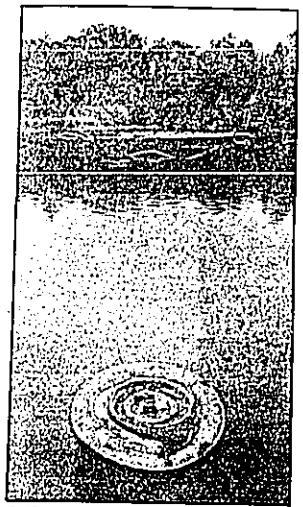


A tire floats at the edge of Newburgh Lake, just west of Newburgh Pointe in Livonia. The lake is a popular fishing spot in western Wayne County.

Continued from previous page

ic to public health.

According to a federal EPA study done in 1982, the contents of the Lower Rouge included iron findings at 40,000 milligrams per kilogram, cadmium at 96 milligrams per kilogram, PAHs (polyhydrocarbons) at 125 milligrams per kilogram, PCBs at 10 milligrams per kilogram and 2 milligrams of dibensofuran.

The report further noted that the Lower Rouge had the highest concentration of volatile hydrocarbons when compared to other rivers like the Ecorse and Huron. The worst spot was into Melvindale and Detroit, south of Dearborn and Allen Park.

Hartig said that only recently have government agencies become sophisticated enough to test for toxins. Compounding the problem, the tests are costly, running into thousands of dollars, as compared to less costly fecal coliform tests.

The state DNR, Hartig said, recently began testing fish samples, looking for tumors and signs of carcinogens.

STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Ducks share the shoreline with a discarded plastic milk container along the riverside in Plymouth. The more serious pollutants are less visible than the tires, milk jugs and other jetsam of civilization.

"Just because you have contamination in sediments may not tell the problem. There's life in the river and the contamination could be to macro-intervertabrae. This could all be moved up thorugh the food chain with people eating the fish," he said.

"We're just going to have to do some monitoring of the sources."

One investigator for the state DNR, Bill Stone of the Northville office, said there are 37 permit-issued industrial discharge points along the river basin. These are tracked for industrial pollutants. He personally oversees 19 of them.

According to Stone, industrial pollution accounts for a small fraction of the river's problem, somewhere less than 10 percent. And in all but four of these cases, the discharge is cooling water, or industrial "wash water," which is used to cool down machinery in the manufacturing process. The state allows this discharge but monitoring is required, sometimes daily and weekly.

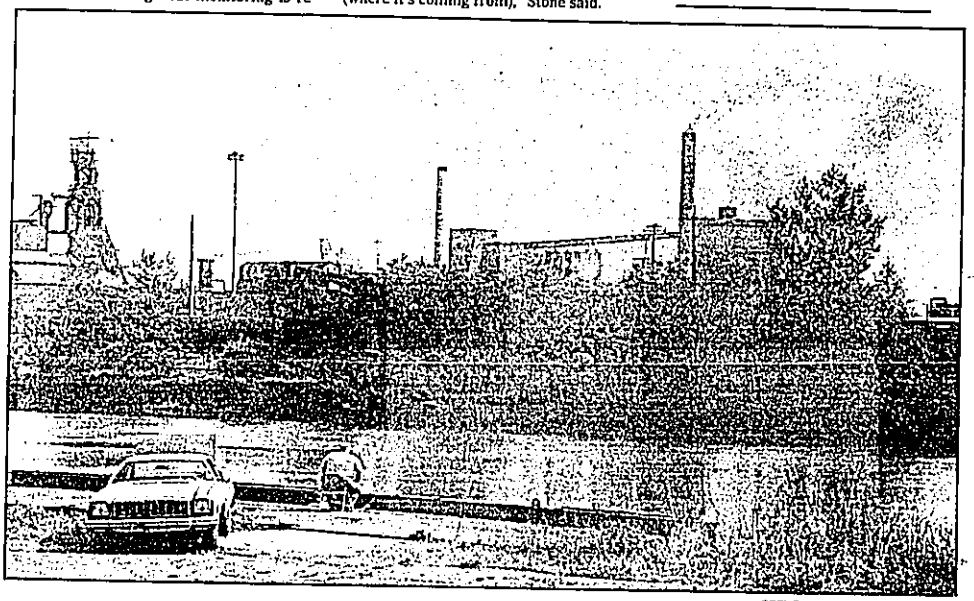
The exceptions are based in the Dearborn area, the Rouge Steel Plant and the Double Eagle Steel Plant. Here, toxins such as cyanide, a byproduct of steelmaking, occur. But Stone said the plant treats these discharges with chlorine to make them ineffective by the time they enter the river.

At the Ford Rouge Plant there is also an oily run-off that enters the river, so the operators are required to skim it off, using machinery designed for this.

A greater problem than industrial discharges, however, are the industrial discharges that enter the river through storm sewers, he said. Illegally dumped coolants, which are toxic, pesticides and oils may enter the stream this way.

"This is probably a more difficult problem to attack than direct industrial discharges because it's so hard to pinpoint (where it's coming from)," Stone said.

An estimated 6 billion gallons of human waste is sent into the river each year, state sources said, from some 185 combined sewer outlets — sewers that carry both storm water and raw sewage from homes and industry. About 25 percent of the river basin is drained through these combined sewers. Today they are recognized as outdated forms of drainage.



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

A man and his dog wait for the fish to bite in the deep waters off Zug Island, where the Rouge empties into the Detroit River.

Staff credits

This special supplement to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers is the result of many hours of effort by more than a dozen talented staff members. The major contributors are listed below. Several other writers and editors also lent their time and expertise.

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