

# NPL Site Narrative for Onondaga Lake

## ONONDAGA LAKE Syracuse, New York

**Conditions at Proposal (May 10, 1993):** The Onondaga Lake site is located in the City of Syracuse and in the Towns of Salina, Geddes, and Camillus, Onondaga County, New York. Onondaga Lake is approximately 4.5 miles long and averages 1 mile in width. Seven major tributaries flow into the lake; water exits the lake via a barge canal at its northwest end and flows into the Seneca River. The land immediately adjacent to the lake consists primarily of industrial properties and county parks. The site is composed of the lake itself, its tributaries and the upland hazardous waste sites which have contributed or are contributing contamination to the lake (sub-sites).

A ban was placed on public fishing from the lake in 1970 due to high concentrations of mercury in several species of fish. The lake was re-opened to fishing in 1986 on a catch and release basis only. Population and industrial growth in the areas surrounding Onondaga Lake has resulted in extensive biological, chemical, and physical degradation of its waters. In addition to mercury contamination in the lake, analyses of sediment samples detected barium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, lead, benzene, chlorobenzene, total xylenes, various polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, pesticides, and PCBs.

Historical information indicates that the lake received surface water discharges from various industrial processes and municipal waste water treatment plants. Initially, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has evaluated only operations of Allied Signal, Inc. (AS) and/or its predecessors, and Linden Chemicals and Plastics, Inc. (LCP), now owned by the Hanlin Group. EPA is attempting to identify additional potentially responsible parties.

The AS facilities manufactured numerous organic and inorganic chemicals. AS's Willis Avenue plant and LCP's Bridge Street plant (located west of the Main Plant complex), used a mercury cell process to produce chlorine, sodium hydroxide, and potassium hydroxide. Each plant discharged aqueous waste streams containing mercury as part of normal operations. Other waste sources include AS's Solvay Waste Beds containing by-products generated from soda ash production and Semet Residue Ponds containing wastes generated from acid washing of light oil.

Several consent orders have been signed in recent years between AS and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) related to the Solvay Waste Beds, the Semet Residue Ponds and ground-water contamination at the location of the Willis Avenue Plant. In early 1992, AS and the NYSDEC signed a consent decree to perform a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) to determine the type and extent of contamination at Onondaga Lake and to identify alternatives for remedial action.

NYSDEC has also filed an action against the Hanlin Group under Subtitle C of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). The Hanlin Group commenced bankruptcy proceedings on July 10, 1991.

**Status (December 1994):** Presently, AS is performing the Onondaga Lake RI/FS and RI/FSs for the Solvay Waste Beds, Semet Residue Ponds, and Willis Avenue Plant. EPA has entered into a cooperative agreement with NYSDEC to provide funds so that NYSDEC can coordinate, manage, and oversee the

ongoing work at the subsites and prepare a comprehensive RI/FS for the Onondaga Lake NPL site. NYSDEC, together with EPA, has started mailing information request letters to companies located in the Onondaga Lake watershed in an attempt to identify other potentially responsible parties.

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at [ATSDR - ToxFAQs](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.