

NEWSLETTER — August, 2003

*Newsletter is produced and distributed by the Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association (BSRA), an umbrella group of condos/beach/cottage/subdivision associations, as a service to the shoreline residents in Hay and Stanley Wards. It is funded by the Member Associations and its Associate Members. For information on membership, please contact the Membership Secretary, **Jim Chapman**, at (519) 235-1644 or (519) 565-5303, or by e-mail at [Click here for contact email address](#). BSRA's Postal Address is **BSRA, GMB #411, RR 2, Zurich ON N0M 2T0**. BSRA's web site is www.bsra.ca, and its e-mail address is [Click here for contact email address](#).*

This is to remind you about BSRA's Annual Meeting, to be held on Saturday, September 6, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church Hall on Highway 21, about midway between the Northern and Southern boundaries of Bluewater. Although only the official representative of each constituent association is able to vote, all are welcome and may take part in the discussions.

Municipal Election

Probably the most important issue for BSRA this Fall will be the local Municipal elections. In order

to ensure that Bluewater Municipal Council is knowledgeable about Shoreline issues that affect each member of BSRA, the Association will be endorsing one candidate for each Council seat for which we are able to vote; that is, for Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Councillor at Large, and a Councillor for your own ward, either Stanley West or Hay West. BSRA has already announced at Press Conferences that the Association endorses **Bill MacDougall** as a candidate in Hay West ward, **George Irvin** as a candidate in Stanley West ward, and **Jim Fergusson** as a candidate for Councillor-at-large. They have been endorsed because the Executive Committee has confidence that these candidates can fairly represent the interests of all residents of Bluewater while bringing special knowledge of Shoreline issues to the Municipal Council and the County Council. After the close of nominations, BSRA will be contacting you to advise you of names of other candidates that BSRA endorses. As this will be a mail-in vote, it is very important that all BSRA Members mail in their ballots promptly after receiving them to ensure that we provide maximum support for the candidates BSRA endorses. The next Newsletter will provide further information.

Environmental Issues

For several years, the Newsletter has attempted to bring Environmental issues to its readers, and sometimes even has had an entire issue on Environmental concerns, and the rest of this Newsletter is devoted to such issues. Although there is a whole host of Environmental issues in Bluewater, the over-riding concern is that of Lake Water Quality, especially as the Lake is the main reason that Bluewater Shoreline residents have purchased property along the shoreline.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of warning signs posted along Lake Huron by the various Health Units, and an increase in the number and frequency of “no swimming” warnings. The permanent warning signs are in two categories. **Blue signs warn that high bacteria counts are possible** for up to two or three days following rain or high wave action, and swimmers are advised not to put their heads under water, (let alone drink it), and to towel dry themselves briskly to prevent swimmers’ itch. The **red signs indicate that any swimming there is hazardous** due to polluted water.

At the same time, “watchdog” organizations such as the Huron Farm Environment Coalition and the Huron County Water Quality Coalition have become inactive, and even the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation no longer is holding its very informative seminars. Fiscal constraints have restricted meaningful environmental activity at many levels, including the provincial level. Because of this absence of leadership elsewhere, BSRA’s Executive Committee chose to establish an Environmental Committee to “monitor and make recommendations to the Executive Committee with respect to matters affecting the environment within Bluewater, including land water and air. Water Quality, sewage treatment, the Nutrient Management Act, and the [Municipality’s] Manure By-law fall within the scope of the Committee’s review.”

The Committee’s first action was to recommend the expansion of the water-testing program that had been undertaken at St. Joseph Shores for some years, originally with the co-operation of the Ausable-Bayfield Conservation Authority, but recently undertaken by the subdivision association alone. The Association has developed a system of more rapid turnaround with the testing lab, and is usually able to receive a lab report in as little as two days after testing. The choice of St. Joseph

Shores as a testing site was mainly due to the fact that the beach has shown fairly consistently high levels in the lake water of *e-coli*, (the “marker” bacterium that is easily tested for, but which indicates the probable presence of other pathogens, that is, disease-causing organisms, as well), such that the local Health Unit has permanently posted a red warning sign to advise against swimming there. It is also interesting to note that the outflow from the Zurich sewage lagoons reaches Lake Huron at St. Joseph Shores.

In order to ascertain the extent of bacterial pollution along the Bluewater shoreline, four sites were chosen for such testing: Houston Heights, (where there is also a Health Unit test site), Sunset Estates, St. Joseph Shores, (as noted above), and Ridgeway/Norman Heights. In addition, several other Associations wanted to participate in the testing, and it was decided by the BSRA Executive Committee to pay for the testing by those associations requesting to do so, provided that the Association involved had a 75% or better contribution rate to the Reserve Fund. This was because each test costs \$10.00, and the testing is being paid for by the Reserve Fund.

The principal benefit of this testing will be in establishing an understanding of the general level of pathogenic pollution, (by disease-causing organisms), for the Bluewater shoreline, in following seasonal trends, in identifying locational trends along the shoreline, and in documenting long-term trends over several years. Provided that other data are recorded, including weather conditions, waves, etc., correlations with specific types of episodes can also be established. Examples of these might include high bacterial counts following heavy rainfalls, after sewage lagoon overflows or dumping, following manure spreading, etc.

It is very important to remember that a specific reading reflects only the moment in time when the sample was taken. Thus, for example, each person must be prepared to make a wise choice about whether to swim in the Lake based on longer-term trends in the readings, not necessarily on a single reading taken two or three or even four days earlier. The best indicators of likely water pollution are these:

- a. Pollution levels are likely to be higher for as much as **up to 48 hours or longer following a rainfall**. As rain falls on all of the land surface, fields with active pathogens on the surface, or in field tiles or drains, will be “flushed” into the collector streams and flow into the lake. The pollution levels will also depend on a number of factors, principally the volume of water falling as rain and the duration of the rainfall. Along the Lake Huron littoral, (area sloping to the Lake), most of the drainage will occur within 48 hours. Before deciding to swim, you should be aware of recent rainfall, watch the volume of water flowing into the Lake from ravines, or look for the tell-tale areas of brown cloudy water offshore from a ravine, or along the lakeshore from a ravine.

- b. Pollution levels are likely higher when there are **waves two feet high or higher**. Strictly speaking, wave height is measured as the difference between the height of the water at the crest and the height at the bottom of the trough. It isn't the wave height itself that is the problem. When the waves strike the shore, they stir up the sand and other sediments along the shoreline. This releases bacteria that have been trapped in the sediments when the wave action slows or stops, and allows the bacteria in the water to be buried under the sediments settling out of the water. Studies have shown that bacteria, including *e-coli*, can encapsulate themselves for protection, and remain alive for a year or more, even in a frozen state. Thus, the bacteria causing a problem might be from an episode occurring some time ago. Jumping the high waves might be fun, but the risks of becoming infected are increased during such time. A shower following such activity is advised; open cuts or wounds are a problem, and, of course, **drinking the lake water or entering ravine water is always a no-no**.
- c. **Turbidity in the water** is usually evidence that particles in the water, perhaps including bacteria, have not yet settled out. There may have been inland rainfall that didn't reach the shoreline even though its runoff did, and the turbidity is most often evidence of rainfall somewhere. Turbidity could also be evidence of a pollution episode, from a manure spill directly or indirectly into a waterway, or from industrial pollution, or even from pumping out ships' ballast or for some other reason. In any case, if you are standing in the Lake up to your knees and cannot see your feet, the safety of the water is very questionable. If the turbidity is in a definite mass or area, you should likely call the Health Unit and/or the Ministry of the Environment.

Although this Newsletter has noted it in the past, you should keep in mind that *e-coli* is only a "marker" bacterium, and indicates the presence of other pathogens. However, as the world learned from the Walkerton disaster, a particularly virulent strain of *e-coli*, (type O157H7), which is found in cattle and in humans, and in their wastes, (not in pigs nor poultry), can infect vulnerable humans with disastrous effects. Thus, particular vigilance about cattle manure and human sewage is necessary, with special vigilance about cattle manure "spills". As was learned from Walkerton, even persons with specific responsibilities to avoid pollution incidents can be "careless" if it suits one's own particular agenda, no matter how horrendous the outcome for others.

Thus, although some BSRA Associations have posted weekly results of the water-sampling studies, other Associations have preferred that their members interpret the conditions as they are at the time they are choosing to swim rather than uncritically follow data from a "snapshot" two or more days earlier, and perhaps out of date. For both groups, however, it is essential that everyone should thoroughly understand the Lake water conditions that are most liable to indicate unsafe swimming. Nonetheless, the expanded water-testing program is seen to be very useful, and here are the results for the four major sites to date. These results are not intended to be alarmist, but are offered to ensure that all BSRA members are aware of the seriousness of the problem. Results over 100, the level generally accepted as indicating pollution, are underlined

Houston Heights

Sunset Estates St. Joseph Shores

Ridgeway/Norman Hts

2003	Ravine	North	South	Ravine	North	South	Ravine	North	South	Ravine	North	South
			<u>South</u>									
July 5			<u>2100</u>	8	34		<u>120</u>	3	50			
July 7	<u>270</u>	20	20	<u>4000</u>	30	70	<u>770</u>	<u>470</u>	100	<u>1000</u>	40	80
July 17		<u>750</u>	100	<u>190</u>	90	40	<u>110</u>		<u>430</u>	40	90	<u>690</u>
July 24		<u>380</u>	<u>170</u>	<u>120</u>	50	10	50		<u>13070</u>	50		<u>380</u>
50	10											
July 31		20	10	10	10	10	10	80	10	40	<u>610</u>	20
Aug. 7	<u>200</u>	20	20	<u>120</u>	20	50	<u>610</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>190</u>	<u>640</u>	<u>160</u>	<u>160</u>

Aug.14 (The test results for the samplings taken on this date were lost because of the electricity blackout.)

The Next Steps

Firmly believing that it is not good enough to merely point out that problems exist, and state what those problems are, but that it must provide practical solutions to environmental problems, the BSRA Executive has accepted the recommendations of the Environment Committee to send a letter to Bluewater Council, urging that the Council:

- assume a stronger leadership role on environmental issues, (e.g., to become pro-active rather than re-active), especially with other levels of government and organizations outside Bluewater;
- upgrade sewage lagoon systems within Bluewater to include filtration and treatment of effluent, and to enable septic tank cleanout material (septage) and manure to be treated in sewage control systems;
- pass a septic system by-law designed to ensure that all septic systems in Bluewater are functioning correctly;
- increase the supports provided by the Council to “family farm” operations to help protect them from “factory farm” operations;
- impose a moratorium on livestock “factory farm” operations, either as expansions or as new operations, using its power of control through official plans, zoning by-laws, etc., especially in light of the lack of regulation from higher levels of government; and

- f. impose a moratorium on any expansion or implementation of livestock operations that will use the application of liquid manure to agricultural fields as part of their nutrient/manure management plans.

The idea is to undertake a step-by-step elimination of all sources of pollution that lie within the direct or indirect control of the Council. The letter proposing these solutions should be on the agenda for the Council meeting of August 25. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m., but BSRA's presentation of the letter may not be the first item on the agenda. Meanwhile, the BSRA Executive Committee and its Environment Committee both intend to continue to focus on water pollution related to Lake Huron, and to avoid the many distracting environmental side-issues that dissipate the collective energies of the Association into unproductive and unprofitable wheel-spinning. Members should check BSRA's website, www.bsra.ca, for current information, and check the local newspapers for other information of assistance to Shoreline Residents.

Bob Campbell, President

Compiled by Doug Banks, Newsletter Editor

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