

News Release

Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency

The Local Health Department

serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties

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Public Health Alert Issued: Avoid Certain Areas of Shoreline in Bay Harbor

(September 3, 2004) Officials from the Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency issued a Public Health Advisory today instructing people to avoid certain areas near the shoreline along Bay Harbor, two to three miles west of the Village and Marina, after the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) confirmed that a highly alkaline discharge--from old cement kiln dust piles--is impacting these areas of Little Traverse Bay. The discharge seeping along the shoreline, with pH levels similar to very strong bleach, is hazardous to humans and pets.

Staff from the MDEQ's Water Section has been monitoring water runoff from the Bay Harbor Golf Course, which was developed on an abandoned cement factory, and notified the health agency when a risk to human health was suspected. The MDEQ is leading an investigation to determine the severity and extent of the alkaline discharge, which turns a reddish color when it reaches water. During the investigation, MDEQ observed elevated pH levels for over 600 feet of shoreline in Bay Harbor and out to about 90 feet from the shore in the affected areas.

"We're concerned about the potential health risks associated with exposure to these isolated shorelines," said Joshua Meyerson, Medical Director for the health agency. "Burns to the skin, eyes, and mouth may result from contact with these waters."

The shoreline is accessible from the water, however, Bay Harbor is acting to restrict access by placing buoys offshore to restrict watercraft from the area. In addition, Bay Harbor officials have posted signs prohibiting bodily contact with the surface waters in the affected area. "This situation is serious, however, the discharge is located on a stretch of beach that is not widely used and exists adjacent to private property. Bay Harbor has taken steps to notify homeowners of the problem and is working with the MDEQ to exact a long-term solution to future problems of this nature," said Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health Services for the Health agency.

The MDEQ will continue to monitor the area until corrective action steps are taken to remedy the situation. Their staff is still in the process of investigating the situation and is responsible for

remediation. “Our immediate concern is the safety of the public in these areas along Little Traverse Bay,” Meyerson said. The Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency is the local health department serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties. Its staff is dedicated to preventing disease and injury and promoting healthy communities. For additional information contact Rick Schumacker at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality at (989) 705-3424.

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