

News Release

Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency

The Local Health Department

serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties

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New Public Health Advisory Issued for Bay Harbor/East Park Area

(April 28, 2006) Officials from the Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency issued a new Public Health Advisory today that warns watercraft to avoid the Village Harbor Lake entry channel and discourages public access in an effort to protect individuals from exposure to highly-caustic leachate. The Village Harbor entry channel is a private waterway connected to Lake Michigan's Little Traverse Bay and is located over a half-mile east of Bay Harbor Lake and along the western side of East Park. Since 2004, the Health Department has issued five Public Health Advisories and has restricted more than one mile of shoreline due to discharges of leachate from several cement kiln dust piles located on the Bay Harbor property and at Resort Township's East Park.

People are advised not to make direct contact with surface waters within the channel. "We are concerned about public exposure and accessibility to impacted areas," said Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health Services for the Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency, the Health Department that serves Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties.

He issued the Advisory after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) discovered a new 400-foot long stretch of leachate accumulation at the bottom of the Village Harbor Lake entry channel and after the identification of releases along the channel's eastern side. "Leachate" is water that collects contaminants as it migrates through cement kiln dust piles left at the resort development from when the Penn-Dixie Cement Plant operated at the site.

Kendzierski also directed Bay Harbor to notify property owners within Lakeshore Village, which is a private development located adjacent to the channel. Public health officials will be working with CMS Energy, which is responsible for environmental cleanup, to enhance existing notification and access control measures designed to prevent public contact with leachate, a highly alkaline solution similar to a very strong bleach which can cause chemical burns. Information provided to the Health Department by EPA and CMS show elevated pH levels of 9.17 to 12.0 s.u. (standard units) along the bottom of the channel at depths of 15-20 feet. Additional releases have been observed on the eastern edge of the channel exhibiting pH levels between 9.31 and 12.3 near the surface. According to the Michigan Department of Community

Health, exposure to water at a pH greater than 9.0 may result in irritation to eyes, skin, and mucous membranes; pH levels over 11.5 may result in irreversible damage to these tissues.

In 2005, Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) conducted a Health Consultation under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry that outlined the scope of caustic discharges at Bay Harbor, along with recommendations from MDCH. The Health Consultation can be found at www.michigan.gov/mdch.

“We’ve observed leachate venting in at least three distinct areas within the channel,” said Kendzierski. “Due to its proximity to East Park, we suspect these new leachate releases in the channel are connected to an already-identified cement kiln dust pile at East Park. It’s not likely to be from another source.”

“The nature of the geology at East Park is complicated,” Kendzierski said. “There has been variability in the other releases, and at this time we don’t fully understand the dynamics of this new area.” CMS, EPA officials, and their consultants will continue their investigation to further characterize the releases and their behavior within and along the bottom of the channel. Additional information will be provided to the public when it is made available.

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 about this or previous Public Health Advisories, contact Kendzierski at (231) 547-7651 or visit the Health Department website at www.nwhealth.org.



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