

News Release

Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency

The Local Health Department

serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY EXTENDED ALONG LAKE MICHIGAN SHORELINE

(March 24, 2005) Following review of laboratory analyses of samples collected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last week, a Public Health Advisory was extended today along the Lake Michigan shoreline—at Bay Harbor and at East Park—bringing the total to three areas restricted to the public in the past six months because of caustic leachate from the former Penn-Dixie cement plant.

Resort Township's East Park is the first public property to be restricted due to highly alkaline surface waters from an historical cement kiln dust (CKD) pile located under the public park; the other two sites are located along Little Traverse Bay in Bay Harbor and are the result of accumulated CKD material under portions of the golf course. Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health for the local health department, issued a Public Health Advisory for the East Park shoreline after laboratory tests confirmed pH levels ranging from 11.37 to 11.90 on beach areas at East Park. The identification of other highly alkaline waters (pH 11.64) outside the known seep areas within the Bay Harbor development, has resulted in extending the restricted area 200 feet closer to Harbor Lake.

According to the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH), 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.

“Surface waters with elevated pH measurements at East Park do not exhibit the discolored appearance that is characteristic of the seeps identified within Bay Harbor and which makes them conspicuous,” Kendzierski said. “This demonstrates the need to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the entire shoreline.” Kendzierski has directed Resort Township Officials to post signs that identify the hazard, associated health effects, and that prohibit access to the affected waters. He has also requested fencing be erected to restrict access to highly alkaline surface waters at East Park.

“Our immediate concern is the safety of the local community and the unsuspecting public, especially children, and their exposure to the contaminated areas,” said Kendzierski. “Children

are at greater risk than adults from exposure to many hazardous substances," he said. "Children, animals, and pets might not recognize the water as a danger and could drink it or get corrosive water in their eyes or elsewhere on their skin. That's one reason why we've ordered the area around the discharges to be restricted to the public and are recommending fencing of all areas showing unsafe pH levels," he said.

Kendzierski said, "Lake Michigan is an incredible natural resource and we are encouraged to see the regulatory agencies engaged with the responsible parties to achieve a long term solution for both the public health and environmental concerns."

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 the Public Health Advisory, contact Kendzierski at (231) 547-7651.

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