

News Release

Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency

The Local Health Department

serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties

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Health Department extends Public Health Alert along Bay Harbor shoreline

(December 3, 2004) Health Department officials issued a Public Health Alert today for a second stretch of Bay Harbor shoreline. Following verification from the US Environmental Protection Agency, highly alkaline leachate is seeping into Little Traverse Bay from another Bay Harbor location—approximately one-half mile west of the outlet of Harbor Lake to Lake Michigan, near the Bay Harbor Golf Club. This second stretch of shoreline, some 800 feet long, is located 1,000 feet from an area of Bay Harbor shoreline which has had restricted access since September, when the local health department issued a Public Health Alert because of dangerous alkalinity levels.

Alkaline discharges from cement dust kiln piles, from the site of the former Penn Dixie cement plant, pose a serious health risk to humans and animals on or near the affected areas, with dangerous pH levels as high as 13.0, similar to a very strong bleach. The Michigan Department of Community Health considers pH levels of this magnitude to be a direct contact and public health hazard.

Recent sampling has confirmed that in addition to elevated pH, the leachate from cement kiln dust also contains other dangerous chemicals, including mercury and arsenic.

“We have been working with the EPA to facilitate a solution to the exposure issues revolving around the leachate discharges without compromising the ability to monitor the effectiveness of leachate removal activities,” said Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health Services. “It is a very complicated problem which requires immediate action on the beach, as well as a well thought out plan for addressing the source of the leachate.”

According to Kendzierski, EPA's Emergency Response Program staff recently issued a written “notice of potential liability” to potentially responsible parties, including owners, previous owners, and operators of the former Penn Dixie quarry. Within the notice, the EPA outlined a strategy to conduct emergency response activities and removal of leachate to prevent discharges of contaminants to Little Traverse Bay. In addition, the notice provided a requirement to restrict access to the affected areas by erecting fences, posting signs, and providing security of the

shoreline. The shoreline is currently accessible by residents and employees of Bay Harbor, and from Lake Michigan by boaters and other recreational watercraft.

“We are concerned about the unsuspecting public, such as visitors to Bay Harbor,” said Kendzierski, “and are partnering with other governmental agencies and interested parties to protect the public and help direct the management of impacts to the environment.”

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 Alerts issued for areas along the Bay Harbor shoreline, telephone Kendzierski at (231) 547-6523.

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