

News Release

Health Department of Northwest Michigan
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Health Department downgrades East Park Public Health Advisory

(June 18, 2009) Following comprehensive analysis and review of water samples collected at East Park, public health officials have downgraded the Public Health Advisory that has restricted access at the beach area for the last five years, authorizing the removal of existing fencing and signage. The original East Park Public Health Advisory was issued in 2004 to protect beach-goers from burns caused by high pH levels measured in near shore water contaminated by cement kiln dust at the former industrial site. “We’re pleased water quality has improved enough to allow us to downgrade the existing Public Health Advisory,” said Kendzierski. “After many improvements to the leachate collection systems at the shore, surface water testing has shown no water quality exceedances in pH for over a year.”

The Public Health Advisory will now take the form of a notification at the park itself and will not restrict access or contact with the water. Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, said he is working with Resort Township officials to post “Public Health Advice” signs at East Park. The signage is a precautionary notification to the public that lake water at the park may cause skin or eye irritation and recommends rinsing with tap water after contact with the lake.

“Although current water testing results meet Michigan water quality standards for pH, we have some concerns. There are still issues with high pH levels in monitoring wells on site and we’ll continue to examine these very closely,” Kendzierski said. “We’ll continue to recommend rinsing after wading or swimming at the beach as an extra precaution. Our first priority was, and is, protecting public health.”

“It has been a long process to install the complex systems that now collect and manage leachate before venting to Little Traverse Bay at East Park. Although a “final remedy” is not yet in place, the interim controls are showing to be effective while work continues on a permanent solution.” Kendzierski said the local health department is working with the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) to communicate with the public through “Public Health Advice” postings at key locations at East Park so beach-goers are aware of the potential risks and can take the necessary steps to prevent exposure. Additionally, Resort Township will be installing a spray area so beach-goers can rinse off after wading or swimming.

CMS, which is responsible for the cleanup of cement kiln dust left at the site, has made significant modifications at East Park to prevent leachate from making its way to Little Traverse Bay. Several engineering methods were employed including, excavating and reconsolidating of the CKD pile, providing a cap, installing targeted collection trenches, constructing a slurry wall along the Village Harbor Channel and drilling diversion wells to capture groundwater before it flows through the pile.

“It appears these interim controls have been able to hold back the leachate releases we’ve observed over the last five years. We have seen great improvement in water quality and will be looking at data as it continues to come in,” Kendzierski said.

CMS is obligated to continue collecting surface water data to measure the effectiveness of the collection systems and evaluate water quality at East Park. Monitoring results are provided to public health officials on a regular basis for review. Many factors can affect the collection system including water levels, weather events, and engineering malfunctions, among others.

“It’s a very dynamic environment and we need to be responsive when conditions change,” remarked Kendzierski.

The Health Department will continue to evaluate surface water testing results to determine what actions, if any, need to be made with respect to public health. Any changes to existing Public Health Advisories will be communicated to the public and posted on the Health Department’s website, www.nwhealth.org.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) are continuing to work with CMS to develop a final remedy that meets all of the environmental objectives for the East Park site. CMS is currently investigating and evaluating alternatives for a permanent solution which may include a variety of engineering approaches. No final remedy has been negotiated and the end result may or may not include the systems installed to date.

“Keep in mind, the controls in place right now at East Park are interim controls and CMS must still work with EPA and MDEQ to agree on a final remedy,” Kendzierski said. “The final remedy may include some or all of the existing systems, or may look different than what currently exists today.”

Four additional Public Health Advisories remain in effect in other areas in the Bay Harbor development.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For additional information about the East Park cleanup, contact Kendzierski at 547-6523.

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