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Quarry site near illegal dump

Melanie Hennessey, Special to the Review

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Flamborough Councillor Margaret McCarthy has discovered that land located just a few kilometres away from the proposed St. Marys quarry site was once used as an illegal dumping ground for sludge from a refinery.

The news has left her and residents in the area concerned that the toxic substances, buried during the 1960s on a property 2.7 kilometres away from St. Marys' land in northeast Flamborough, will resurface if and when the quarry is granted permission to conduct water pumping tests.

"The protection of water for my Carlisle residents is my number one priority," McCarthy said.

The councillor began looking into the issue after hearing from a concerned resident about the lands located between Mountsberg and Campbellville roads.

Upon contacting the Ministry of the Environment (MOE), she learned that tank-bottom refinery sludges were illegally disposed of on the property between 1964 and 1965. According to the MOE, two tanks were removed from the property in 1965 and a third was taken away in the late 1970s.

The ministry went on to conduct geophysical surveys in 1982 and 2002 that confirmed all tanks had been removed. It also monitored the groundwater and concluded that residual contamination has been reduced to levels below drinking water guidelines.

In addition, the MOE indicated that the property is located outside the capture zones of the Carlisle wells.

City of Hamilton hydrogeologist David Kerr said he expects that the majority of the contamination has long since migrated into the adjacent tributary of Bronte Creek and offsite.

"However, this opinion is based on limited information," he said. "Contaminant migration and groundwater flow in fractured bedrock can be extremely complicated and uncertain due to the many variables that need to be considered."

The City of Hamilton is now requesting that the MOE provide the investigative reports and supporting documentation regarding the clean-up and monitoring of the site.

The municipality will also ask the MOE to include conditions on any permits that could be issued for St. Marys' pumping test to require sampling for organics during testing and also to ensure water pumping would stop if there's indication of contaminant migration.

McCarthy said now, there's a bigger question she is pursuing: what liability is being assumed by any party involved in the matter if the water pumping is allowed to go ahead?

While a concern was raised around press time Wednesday that a pumping noise overheard on St. Marys' property by a neighbouring resident was the aforementioned pumping test being done without a permit, the City was told by consultants working for the quarry that the noise was actually a local farmer pumping water to irrigate his crops.

City staff was working to confirm the source of the pumping noise Wednesday afternoon.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@miltoncanadinanchampion.com.

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