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Extreme heat, delays result in year's first watering ban

Move will allow city to step up work on new Carlisle well

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Published on Jun 23, 2006

Timetable delays and an unexpected heat wave forced city officials to impose the first watering ban of the season on the hamlet of Carlisle last Sunday.

Jim Harnum, Director of water and wastewater for the city of Hamilton, made the call to ban outdoor water use for 10 days - until June 27 - after the community nearly ran out of water. Water pressure for many homeowners would have been minimal, for about a half-hour span, Saturday night, he said.

The trouble stems from the community's new well, which came on-line in a limited capacity at the end of May. It increased the community's water processing capacity from 29 litres/second to roughly 37 litres/second. However, several upgrades were required to get the water system up to its full capacity of 49.7 litres per second.

Staff had been attempting to work co-operatively with residents, to accommodate both their work needs and the community's water needs. Staff had held a public meeting last month to discuss a new watering schedule, and had settled on outdoor watering between the hours of 7 and 11 a.m., and 7 and 11 p.m.

"But that hasn't been working very well for us," said Harnum. Staff has been attempting to do work - which often requires taking pumps and other equipment offline - during the daytime. "We've been doing half a day here, half a day there," he said. During the work, capacity can often drop to 20 litres/second, he said, which adversely affects the water tower's ability to fill.

The sporadic schedule has also put work crews almost two weeks behind their target, and has allowed work to run into an unexpected warm spell.

"We've never had problems in June before. It's more July and August. The warm weather hit quickly," said Harnum.

So to prevent the tower from running dry again, staff made the call to impose the watering ban, with the goal of working full tilt to fully upgrade the equipment within the 10-day timeframe.

"Instead of piddling around, we'll get it all done at once," he said. "It's too risky not to; the warm weather is here."

To explain the situation to residents, Harnum and 10 staff members spent six hours knocking on doors on Sunday, to speak face-to-face with residents about the situation.

"We're trying to build a good relationship with these people, and show that we're serious about fixing the problem," he said. "We're not trying to just impose another ban."

Harnum was pleased that the vast majority of residents were supportive of the move, though he continues to find some opposition.

The lifting of the ban will coincide with a community open house, scheduled for June 28. Residents are invited to the new well house for a tour and refreshments at 10 a.m. or 6:30 p.m. City staff will be on hand to answer questions about the process and the water system, in an effort to build an understanding.

"We want them to see just how complicated it is," said Harnum. "It's not as simple as putting a well in at the cottage. It's very complicated."

Harnum stressed that the new well isn't a cure-all for Carlisle's water woes; residents will always need to be mindful of their consumption. "Even when we get to full capacity, we still have to talk about conservation," he said.



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