

Otty Lake Pollution Committee Reports

208 Sewage Disposal Systems Found Faulty

In 1971, sewage disposal systems and water quality levels on Otty Lake were examined by the Ontario Water Resources Commission and the Ontario Department of Health, and a pollution control information program was undertaken by the Otty Lake Pollution Control Committee, in cooperation with the University of Toronto, which culminated in the Pollution Control Conference held in Perth last August. Here are the preliminary results of the Government survey, and an outline of the pollution abatement program to be undertaken in 1972.

Of the 323 sewage disposal systems which were examined, 208 are faulty. A few are totally inadequate and are simply pumping sewage into the lake. A large number do not properly function and untreated sewage is reaching the lake. Many more are inadequately designed, too small, or improperly located. Only 125 are satisfactory.

This is a very serious report. Fortunately, the general water quality level is still relatively good and, though pollution levels are rising, we believe that the problem has been discovered in time and can be corrected by immediate action.

Property owners with unsatisfactory sewage disposal systems will be advised by the Waste and Water Management Branch, Department of the Environment, in January or February. If the defect is serious, they will be invited to personal interviews with officials from the Department of Health, to be held in Perth and Ottawa during February and March. Persons with satisfactory systems will not be notified.

When agreement is reached by remedial action at the interviews, time limits will be set and the individuals will be responsible for renovations. If agreement on renovations cannot be reached at the meeting, arrangements will be made for the cottagers and the health officers to meet at the cottage sites, early in the summer, for final decisions.

The Otty Lake Pollution Control Committee's role is to

protect the interests of the individual property owner, while guarding the general interests of the Lake as a whole. We envisage two major problems. Contractors may be in short supply, which could result in the cottagers having difficulty getting the work completed on time. Renovation costs may be high and this could place an undue burden on the average cottager.

The Committee is determined to have all renovations completed within the prescribed time limits. This can be accomplished at reasonable costs if we band together and make the project attractive to contractors with facilities for large scale renovations. If we should find that 50 new septic tanks are needed, we should then be able to get one qualified contractor to take on the entire project, under a proper contract that will include time limits and guarantees. The Committee will be prepared to call for tenders, and to make contractual arrangements.

The Medical Officer of Health will be submerged by inspectional demands in 1972, and to avoid possible delays the Committee will consider the employment of a sewage disposal technician, during the summer, to supervise installations and ensure that official inspections are carried out promptly.

The costs of the renovations may not be great under this arrangement, but if it is found that the costs are beyond the means of the average cottager, the Committee will explore the possibility of obtaining some form of financial assistance.

To facilitate the Committee's work, it will have a representative attend all meetings between Health Officers and the cottagers. In cases where the cottagers are unable to attend the meetings, the Committee will represent them if requested. These requests should be sent to the Secretary-Treasurer, Mrs. Burns, whose address is given below.

There is a natural tendency to single out offenders in situations of this kind and this must be avoided. Our policy

has been to avoid any reference to specific areas of pollution, and this will be maintained. We will, of necessity, become aware of problem cases, but this information will not be divulged.

It is now evident that Otty Lake has enough shoreline cottages and any further increase will accelerate the pollution danger. We are, therefore, of the opinion that further building on shoreline lots should not take place until the present situation has been corrected and until we know a good deal more about pollution control. This matter is being referred to appropriate authorities.

We appreciate the delicate balance involved in building restrictions, which concerns prospective cottagers, tourist agencies, contractors and merchants, so it should be understood that we have no intention of prohibiting building or of closing the lake to new people. We are simply faced with the fact that our traditional recreational development methods can no longer handle the increasing population problems and, in order to safeguard the lake, limitations must be imposed until we have the answers. If the lake dies, there will be nothing left for any of us.

It is important to recognize that pollution control methods are still in the early stages of development, and no one is certain about the final solutions to many of the complex problems that have arisen. This means that individuals could become involved in costly renovations which later prove to be ineffective. The Committee has therefore unanimously endorsed the use of temporary measures of proven value until more accurate knowledge is available. For example, in rocky areas with little topsoil, where septic tanks may not be practical, and holding tanks are of doubtful value, we recommend that cottagers return to inexpensive privies and dry wells, which are entirely satisfactory if properly constructed, until foolproof sewage disposal systems have been developed.

Unauthorized garbage dumps that have sprung up at various locations around the lake have been examined. They are ugly, constitute a health hazard, and are illegal. We have asked the Medical Officer of Health to ensure that they are closed, and that, in future, appropriate action be taken to deal with offenders. It has been suggested that garbage collection be instituted next summer. If you favour such an arrangement, notify the Secretary-Treasurer and give her your location on the Lake. If the demand warrants it, we will find out if such service can be instituted at a nominal cost.

The annual meeting of the Pollution Control Committee will be held in July at Perth. Information will be sent out before the meeting to all members, and will include the agenda, the new constitution, instructions for the election of officers, and so on.

In future, the annual membership dues will be based upon calendar years. The 1972 memberships are now due, and we are seeking support from all property owners. Last year we were supported by about half of the people on the Lake, and we would hope to obtain full support now that the program is underway. Our costs are minimal. All members of the Executive work on a voluntary basis, and with solid support we should be able to maintain the \$2.00 membership fee in spite of increasing activities and rising costs. In fact, it will be your best and most economical investment in 1972. Please send your two dollars to the Secretary-Treasurer, Mrs. John Burns, 784 Lansdale Road, Manor Park, Ottawa, Ontario.

Pollution can be stopped. With your help and understanding we are going to make Otty Lake an example of what should be done to keep our recreational areas clean. Now is the time for action — support your committee.

— J. K. Abbott, Chairman, Otty Lake Pollution Control Committee.