

## Ashbridges Bay /Coatsworth Cut Water Quality and Recreational Use

Recent events have highlighted the issues of stormwater pollution and lake water quality, especially in the area of Ashbridges Bay and Coatsworth Cut (see map). As the weather begins to get warmer and the community is eager to use the lakefront area for recreational purposes, it is important to review safety precautions when using the lake for activities such as swimming and boating.

### Stormwater in Ashbridges Bay

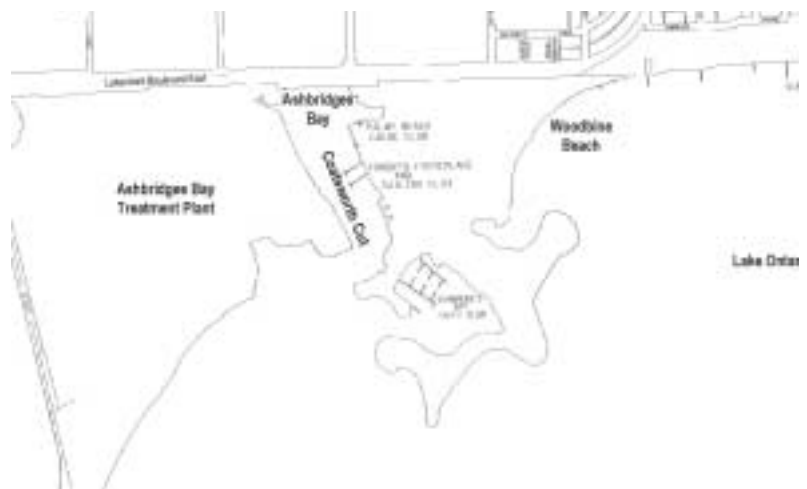
Stormwater, usually in the form of rain, either soaks into the earth to replenish groundwater, or runs off across hard surfaces, such as driveways and roads, into road-side drains and the city's sewer systems. In the older residential neighbourhoods of Toronto, such as those near Ashbridges Bay, stormwater and sewage are collected in the same pipe, known as a combined sewer. During normal conditions, all the wastewater in the combined sewer is treated at a sewage treatment plant. However, during heavy rainfalls or spring thaws, the volume of wastewater in the combined sewers vastly increases. The system becomes overloaded. Built-in overflows (called combined sewer overflows) act as relief points, allowing excess wastewater to leave the sewer system before treatment, emptying into the nearest river or Lake Ontario. This overflow wastewater is a diluted mixture of sewage and stormwater and contains E.coli bacteria. Ashbridges Bay and the Coatsworth Cut area are directly affected by this occurrence.

### Beach Testing

During the summer, Toronto's 14 beaches are tested for water quality and have lifeguards on duty. Water quality tests look at levels of E.coli which, if elevated, may indicate the presence of unsafe levels of disease-causing bacteria. If the water quality is not acceptable for swimming, Toronto Public Health will post signs warning against swimming. When a beach is posted, Public Health officials advise swimmers **not** to enter these waters due to the high amounts of E. coli bacteria in the water. These test results are based on the previous day's sample. For a list of the beaches tested and results throughout the summer, visit: [www.city.toronto.on.ca/beach](http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/beach).

As they are not designated as recreational beaches, Ashbridges Bay and Coatsworth Cut are not tested by Public Health. This area is monitored by the Department of Works and Emergency Services and has been designated as unacceptable for swimming as E.coli bacteria counts consistently exceed acceptable levels.

These areas are not monitored regularly by Public Health and may be contaminated with disease-causing microorganisms (e.g. bacteria). Boating is considered a low risk activity in unmonitored waters as long as passengers do not leave the boat and go into the water (either intentionally or accidentally). There is a risk of infection from exposure if someone becomes accidentally immersed in the water. Those at highest risk include young children, the elderly and those who are chronically ill or have depressed immune systems (e.g. people with HIV).



## **What are the risks of contact with the water?**

Immersion in bacteria-contaminated waters can cause:

- Ear, nose and throat infections
- Stomach upsets and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Skin rashes

## **Boating Clubs on Ashbridges Bay**

Participants and boat clubs should practice the following safety measures in order to reduce the risk of body contact with the water, therefore, reducing the risk of illness.

- Avoid exposing a cut or rash (could be covered with a waterproof bandage)
- Wear a life jacket at all times. If the boat accidentally tips, try to keep your head above water
- Avoid swallowing any water
- Ensure a safety boat is available to quickly retrieve tipped boaters
- Shower immediately after any contact with the water
- Wash hands after boating
- Exercise caution if you are in a high-risk group (identified on previous page)

## **What is the City doing?**

Although already identified with “polluted water” signs, the City is immediately looking at improving the visibility and clarity of these signs to ensure visitors do not mistake this area for a recreational beach.

To improve the water quality of the eastern beaches, the City installed two underground storage tanks in 1992-94. Excess wastewater that previously would have been released directly into the lake is held until the collection system can handle the volume. The wastewater is then treated before it is released. Based on this success, the western beaches storage tunnel was designed and should be fully operational in June (2002).

These tunnels and tanks are only part of the solution. There are still many sewer outfalls and overflows that empty directly into the lake, such as the four that affect Ashbridges Bay.

To address this complex issue, the City of Toronto is also working on a stormwater management plan called the Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan (WWFMMP). The WWFMMP is a partnership with the public and non-profit agencies to improve the water quality of our rivers and the lake. The plan will find ways to prevent, reduce and control the pollution in stormwater runoff and deal with overflows from combined sewers. The draft of the WWFMMP should be submitted to Council later this year, but there’s still time for residents to provide input. Visit the City’s web site: [www.city.toronto.on.ca/wetweatherflow](http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/wetweatherflow) to find out how.

For more information on water and wastewater, please call the Waste and Water Education Line at 416-392-4546.