

# Environment

## Groundwater must be protected

By BARBARA HALSALL  
 In a recent article in Harrowsmith magazine, Prof. John Cherry, head of the Groundwater Institute at the University of Waterloo, is quoted as saying, "Groundwater protection is, in essence, non-existent in Canada." He goes on to say that, "we're a Third World country on this issue."

In a country where more than six million Canadians depend on groundwater, how could we operate with such blind faith? The water for Georgetown, Acton and all the farms in between comes from groundwater yet some do not realize they are drinking water from wells.

The water we drink is called "hard" water. However, the minerals that give it hardness are beneficial to our health. In a 1985 Halton Region Report on water an American study is quoted showing a 15 per cent lower rate for heart disease and hardening of the arteries in areas where these minerals are present in the water.

What happens when water is



polluted? The people of Elmira can tell you that when water is contaminated the answers are not easy. The responsibility for water is shared making it easy to pass off the problem. In November, 1989, Elmira had three of the six municipal wells closed because a suspected cancer causing agent was in the water. Now a year and a half later the problem has not been solved. The polluters are appealing clean up orders through expensive, protracted, appeal-board hearings. This is a disgrace. Must citizens line up dead bodies to get action?

Unfortunately, once an aquifer is contaminated, it cannot be returned to its original state.

A Waterloo based

hydrogeologist, Dave Belanger, estimates that a complete cleanup of the contamination in Elmira could take 20-50 years and cost tens of millions of dollars. At the end would there be any assurance that the water would be safe?

A little pollution goes a long way. One gallon of gasoline can contaminate 4 million gallons of groundwater.

The key is prevention. Once water is polluted who has responsibility? P.O.W.E.R. will examine that question at a public meeting on June 20th at 8 p.m. at Holy Cross Church Hall on Maple Avenue. Attend the Town Meeting to get your questions answered. You can make a difference!

## Environment should take precedence over town development plans

When it comes to development or the environment, the environment should take precedence especially as it concerns Halton Hills and the Town's "unique and fragile environment," says local environmentalist Ashley Ranson.

Mr. Ashley is quick to point out he is not anti-development. "The Town has to grow," said Mr. Ranson. However, "we don't want to destroy what we have got," therefore a development proposal must be proven to be totally environmentally friendly before the Town gives it draft approval.

Draft approval means approval in principle allowing the developer to do some preliminary work on a site. As part of a draft approval, the developer must fulfill certain conditions before construction on the project can proceed full steam ahead.

For example Law Development has received draft approval for the Kingsmill townhouse development in the River Drive area of Georgetown. That means the company is permitted to do some clearing of the site. However, construction of the townhouses can't begin until Maple Avenue is expanded to accommodate the resulting in-

crease in traffic flow.

The Maple Avenue expansion is currently undergoing a class environmental study which is being carried out by the Town. The study is being done in accordance with Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act.

Not pointing to any specific development proposal in Town, Mr. Ashley said by giving draft approval to a developer while an environmental study is being done on an aspect of the project, Town staff will feel undue pressure to ensure that the results of the environmental study do not prevent the development project from going ahead.

Asked whether draft approval should be withheld until all environmental studies are completed, Town Planning Director Ian Keith referred the Herald reporter to Halton Region Planning Department.

Regional Planner Ho Wong said Wednesday the existing system could put "natural pressure" on municipal staff, but not enough to compromise the staff's findings.

He disagreed with Mr. Ashley all environmental studies should be done before draft approval is

given. Mr. Wong explained if environmental studies under the Environmental Assessment Act had to precede draft approvals under the province's act, then that could mean municipalities would be prevented from doing any planning to meet future municipal population growth.

Planners consider the "broad spectrum" of where people should live. If the detailed environmental studies outlined under the Environmental Assessment Act preceded any consideration of possible development locations "the planning process would be stopped at the starting blocks," said Mr. Wong.

However, Mr. Ashley points to the outcome of an Ontario Municipal Board Hearing, (OMB), in Lindsay Ontario held last summer to prove his point.

The case involved the Town of Lindsay granting a developer draft approval for a subdivision before an Environmental Study Report concerning the development was completed.

The board ruled against the granting of the draft approval before the Environmental Study was completed.

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