

Halton Health Unit

Public health inspections

By Brian Ward
(one of a series)

Environmental Sanitation and Food Control is a big name for a big and involved job carried on by Chief Health Inspector Jim Powell and his public health inspectors working for the Halton County Health Unit.

Mr. Powell bluntly summed up his men's duties, saying, "If we're not directly responsible, then we're indirectly involved." The staff of 10 public health inspectors is responsible for checking all outlets in Halton



JAMES POWELL is the chief Public Health Inspector at Halton County Health Unit.

County which handle food in any way, from small restaurants, delicatessens and food stores right up to the largest of the chain food stores. They also check private sewage installations along with many facets of life in the county which will be dealt with later in the story.

"We try to check each food outlet eight times a year or better," said Mr. Powell. "There are many things in restaurants we can check for, including the refrigeration and storage of foods. We check the temperature inside freezers and refrigerators and meat stored here is checked by appearance and odor only, not by quality."

Slaughterhouses are a provincial responsibility, mentioned the chief inspector, since they produce government inspected meats.

His inspectors check the dishwashing procedures used in restaurants and will take tests using special sterile swabs to determine the presence of harmful bacteria on utensils used in the restaurant.

"Our inspector will run one of these cotton-tipped swabs around the areas of the cup or glass or utensil which are most in contact with the customer. These are then sent away to the Department of Health labs in Toronto and the results are sent back to us."

"A list of the faults found by our inspector is then sent to the owner and he usually complies with our suggestions. If the worse comes to worst, we order him to clean up his operation and the Medical Officer of

Health can order the restaurant to close down in extreme cases—although we haven't had a closure in the county in many years," he said.

Checking food outlets is just one of the jobs done by these men and Mr. Powell pointed out one of their other duties involved the inspection of all private sewage disposal systems in the county. This included checking everything from septic tanks and weeping tile fields to outdoor privies.

"Our men are empowered under the Public Health Act to enforce controls over the disposal of sewage. Last year we did nearly 2,400 septic tank inspections and many of these were done on new home sites. We can suggest people improve their sewage disposal facilities and can even order them to do it through the Medical Officer of Health. In fact, there have been two court cases involving such orders this past year."

Summer months see public swimming facilities in full operation and Mr. Powell's men are out in force to keep an eye on all beaches and swimming pools. He said they check public swimming pools thoroughly, keeping an eye on the change rooms as well as the bacteria count of the water.

Periodic checks are done at the Kelso pools and swimming area and inspectors take water samples at various sites along the 12-Mile and 16-Mile Creeks, the Credit River as well as various sites along the shore of Lake Ontario where it touches Halton County. Summer camps are also inspected to be sure they are operated according to special sanitation regulations set out by the government.

"We handle many complaints through this office every year," said Mr. Powell, "but we only investigate complaints when the person complaining gives his name to us. I can remember when I was just starting out as a public health inspector, the office received an emergency complaint which was up in the north-east part of the county. I dropped everything and went up only to find the woman who called the office saw her neighbor's wash was brighter than her own and wanted to know why," chuckled Mr. Powell.

The 10-man health inspector team is stationed throughout the county in offices at Burlington, Oakville and in the head office in Milton. Each of the men is a registered Canadian Public Health Inspector, a two-year course leading up to this was taken at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto.

Other jobs handled by the inspectors include the investigation of suspected cases of rabies. Mr. Powell says his office receives between 500 and 1,000 calls per year on this subject.

They work in close co-operation with the family physician in the case where a person has been bitten by a suspected rabid animal. Inspectors keep the suspected animal quarantined for 14 days and if it dies during that period,



A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH is important to county restaurants and public health inspectors such as Terry Murphy, shown here taking a swab of a restaurant's cup, are responsible for seeing a thorough inspection is done of the business. The swab he takes of this cup is then sent to a laboratory in Toronto where it is tested for bacteria and the results are sent back to the Milton health unit office.—(Staff Photo)

its head is sent to the federal laboratory in Hull, Quebec, for testing. If it proves to be rabid, the doctor will then begin anti-rabies treatments, if he has not done it sooner.

Still more jobs handled by Mr. Powell's department include insect and rodent control. They can recommend, for example, that a restaurant owner who has cockroaches in his place of business call in a professional exterminator to get rid of the pests.

Sampling well water, both private and municipal sources, is another big job done by the inspectors. Between 700 and

800 checks are done on the water taken out of private wells and during 1968, Mr. Powell's office did 1,100 tests on municipal water supplies.

(Continued next week)

Too many fires last year fire board short \$2,600

A deficit of \$2,600 on 1969 operations is indicated in an interim report on the finances of the Milton Area Fire Committee—the group of men appointed by Milton and four area councils to govern the local fire brigade.

Reason for the shortage last year was the large number of fires recorded in 1969. Fire Chief A. E. Clement reports more large fires last year than ever before, and they all cost money. The town's part time firefighters are paid for each hour they are at a fire and several barn and home fires in the past year caused the budget to hit rock bottom.

To make up for the deficit the Fire Area Committee is billing the five municipalities, Milton, Oakville, Burlington, Esquesing and Nassagaweya for their shares of the overdraft. Meanwhile the committee is operating on a savings account it was keeping for a new alarm system, to keep the general expenses paid.

Newest member of the committee was welcomed to the group's first meeting of the year on Wednesday. Councillor Mrs. Ella Foote of northern Burlington replaces former Councillor Art Lindop, whom she defeated in the town's December election. Others returning from last year are Reeve George Currie of

Esquesing, A. R. Service of Fay of Milton, and Councillor Audrey Brush is secretary. Nassagaweya, Councillor Charles Don Gordon of Oakville. Mrs. treasurer.

R.J. Stanbury will speak

Senator Richard J. Stanbury, president of the National Liberal Federation will address the Halton Wentworth and Halton West Liberal Association at their annual meeting Feb. 7 in Burlington.

Constitutional amendments, election of officers and regular business will be taken care of at a 2 p.m. business session followed by a "Meet the dignitaries hour" and a dinner and dance.

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