

Too much bacteria found in Halton wells: Region

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Too many residential wells in Halton contain high levels of bacteria, according to a recent health department study.

The results, presented to the Region's health and social services committee last week, revealed that of the 261 wells randomly tested by the Halton Region Health Department in 2007 — mostly in Milton and Halton Hills — 37 per cent had unacceptable water quality in terms of bacteria. The number is on par with the 2006 results of 38 per cent.

"It is disconcerting to see the results," said Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal. "These percentages are still much too high."

He highlighted one particularly worrisome discovery — of the 37 per cent with bacteriologically unsafe water, 13 per cent had developed the problem since the 2006 study.

But he said the good news is that the health department isn't receiving reports of any illnesses caused by the bacteria.

The study also found that a high proportion of the surveyed wells — up to one third — have deficiencies that could lead to water supplies being contaminated by surface and rain water runoff.

"Many of these deficiencies, such as cracks in well casing or poor drainage around the well head allow bacteria to contaminate the well, making it an unsafe water source," Dr. Nosal reported. "Proper well construction and maintenance is the first line of defense to safeguard drinking water from contamination."

During the 2006 study, health department staff found that up to 34 per cent of the wells they inspected had deficiencies. While they advised the homeowners of the problems, the most recent results show the majority of survey participants didn't make structural improvements to their wells.

The health department advises that even when water treatment devices are used, wells should be inspected at least once a year and the necessary repairs completed.

Private well owners are also recommended to test their water three times a year to ensure it's safe for drinking.

But it appears fewer residents are taking this important step too. The Region reports that the number of water samples taken by homeowners in Halton has decreased from 7,000 samples in 2004 to about 4,000 last year.

Of those who took part in the study in 2007, 40 per cent indicated they test their water less than once a year, while 17

per cent sample three or more times a year, 12 per cent test twice a year and 29 per cent sample once per year.

"(Many people) truly don't feel it's a significant enough health issue," said Dr. Nosal.

He noted some homeowners think they don't need to test their water because they've never had a health problem resulting from their water quality. Even if that's the case, he said it's still important for them to test their water.

Sample bottles are available free of charge and can be picked up at the Halton Regional Centre in Oakville, Milton Town Hall, Conservation Halton's office in Lowville and the health department's Georgetown office. The bottles can also be mailed out to residents at their request.

More health promotion needed: Nosal

While no dramatic improvements were seen in the numbers between the 2006 and 2007 well water studies, Dr. Nosal is confident the health department will ultimately help bring about some changes.

"If there's one thing we know about health promotion it's that one-shot efforts don't work," he said. "We will continue with a variety of strategies."

The health department has many activities planned for the year as part of its Safe Water Program. They include:

- Increasing public access to water sampling bottles by supplying them through other convenient locations throughout Halton
- Having water sample bottles available for mail delivery via the Internet.

At its meeting Wednesday, regional council endorsed the 2008 activities and a motion to have staff review and report

on the feasibility of a mandatory well water testing program, with the possibility of imposing fees for non-compliance.

The notion of mandatory testing set off the alarm bells for rural Councillor Cindy Lunau at town council's meeting this week. She expressed strong opposition to the proposal.

"I think a good number of our rural ratepayers would be very concerned about a mandatory program to test their wells," she said. "There's still some individual responsibility left in our lives."

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com.

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Any resident of the municipality may make a written submission as to whether the issuance of the licence is in the public interest having regard to the needs and wishes of the residents. Submissions must be received no later than **March 21, 2008**. Please include your name, address and telephone number. If petition is submitted to the Commission, please identify the designated contact person. **Note:** The AGCO gives the applicant copies of any objections. Anonymous objections are not considered.

The personal information gathered is collected under the authority of the *Liquor Licence Act*. The principal purpose of the collection is to assess eligibility for the issuance of a liquor sales licence. Copies of all objections are given to the applicant. The information may also be disclosed pursuant to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Questions about this collection should be directed to the Manager, Licensing and Registration, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario at the address, telephone numbers or e-mail address listed below.

Submissions to be sent to: **Licensing and Registration, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, 90 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 200, Toronto, ON M2N 0A4. Tel: 416-326-8700 OR Toll-free in Ontario: 1-800-522-2876. Fax: 416-326-5555. E-mail: licensing@agco.on.ca**

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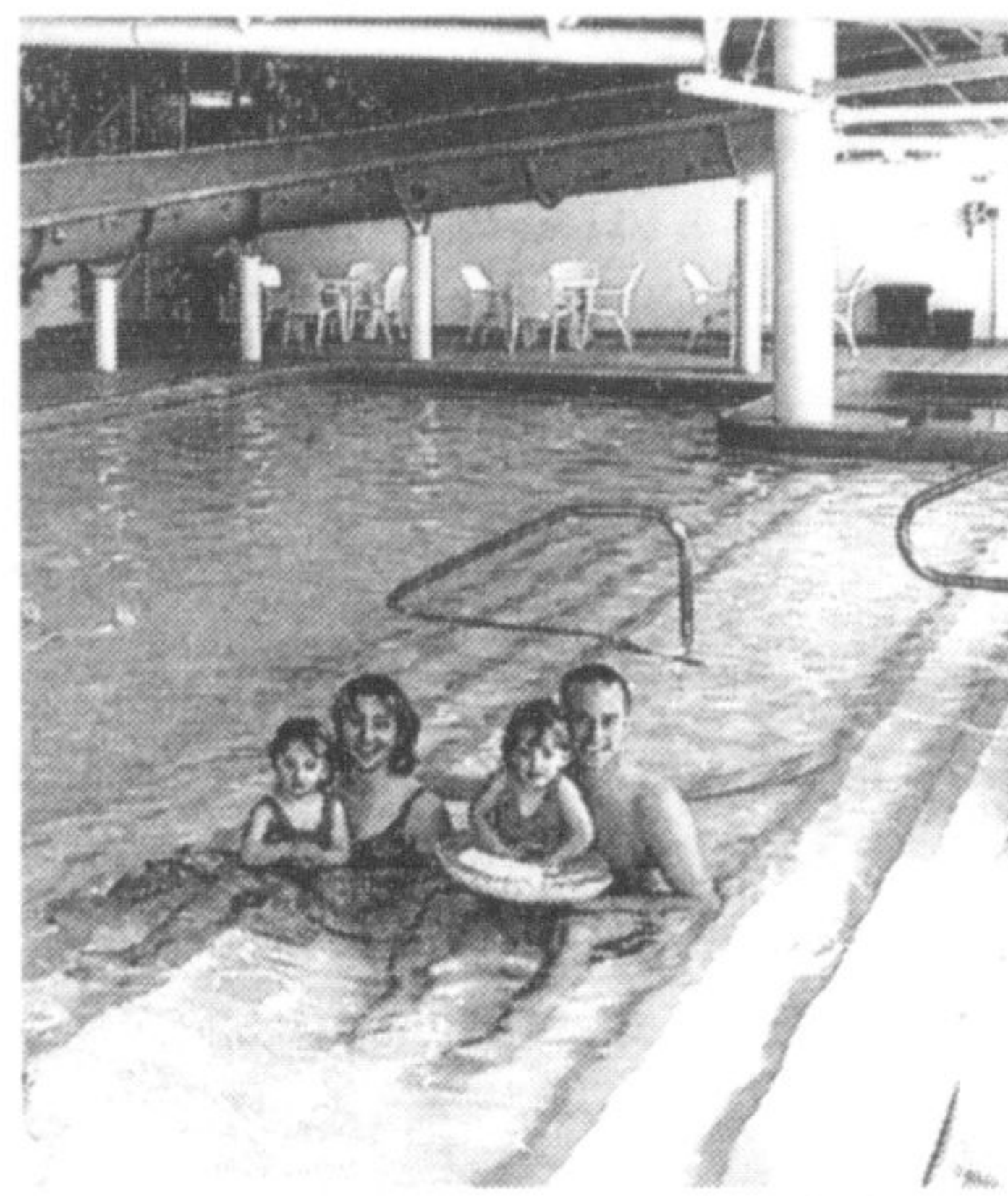
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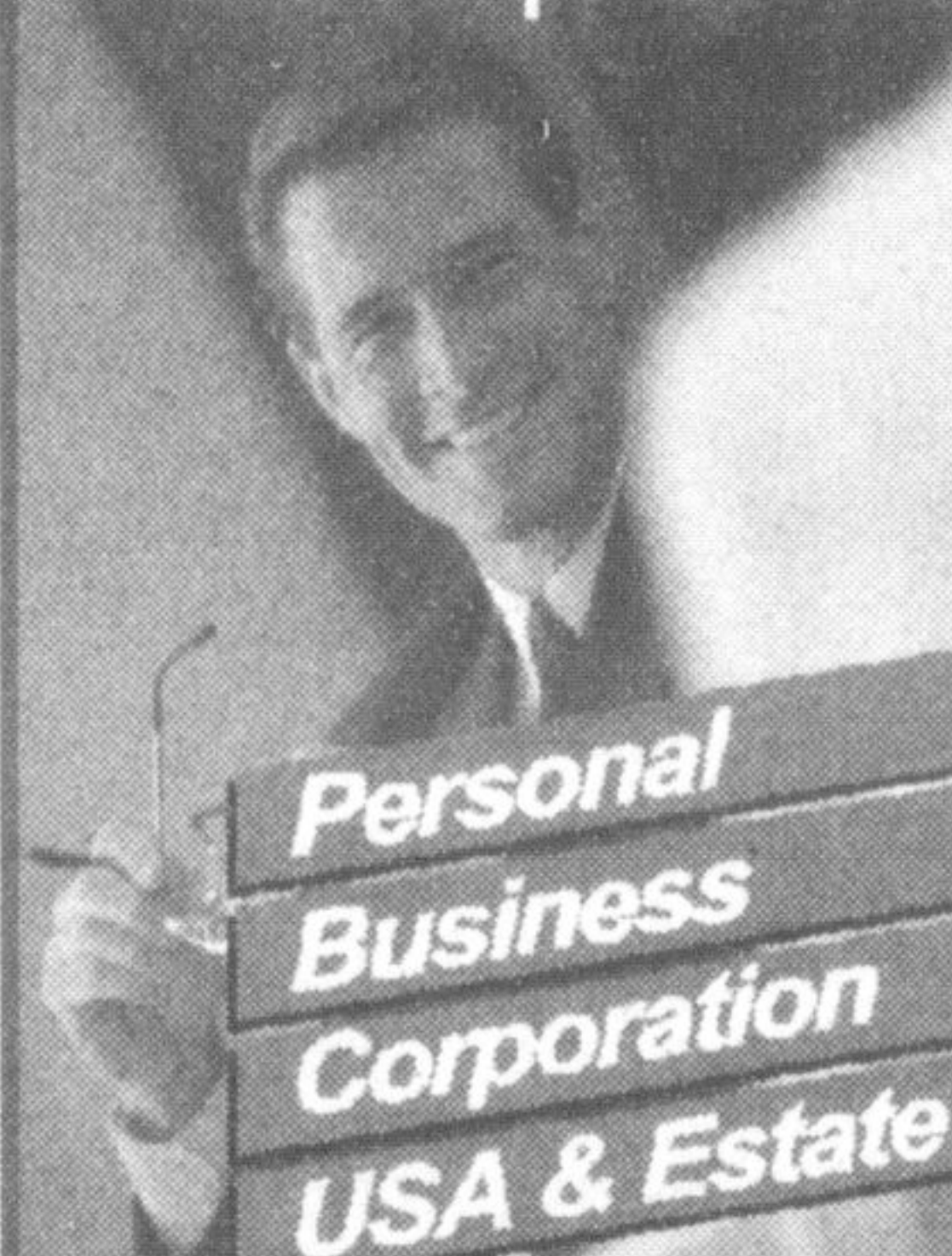
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