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Potentially toxic algae found in Musselman

Officials close lake

ROGER BELGRAVE
Staff Reporter

The presence of potentially toxic algae in Musselman Lake has forced local health officials to close its beaches.

On Monday, the Ministry of Environment identified three types of Cyanobacterial or blue-green algae in the lake. A number of scientific studies indicate many species of blue-green algae are potential toxin producers. Reports have also indicated the algae could have harmful effects on the respiratory and nervous systems of animals, if ingested.

Files have shown several cattle deaths in Ontario associated with blue-green algae poisoning. Among humans, there have been allergic skin reactions and flu-like symptoms. According to a United States Environmental Protection Agency report, laboratory mice have developed skin cancer from ingesting doses of one of the algae species found in Musselman Lake. But York Region's Associate Medical Officer of Health Karim Kurji said the situation needs more investigation before the threat to residents can be fully assessed. Closure of the beaches is a precautionary measure at this point, he said.

"We felt that with the information that we're digging up, it would be advisable on a precautionary basis to close down the beach temporarily," said Kurji. The ministry's tests on local lakes are usually restricted to checking Fecal Coliform levels. At the request of two lake residents, the ministry took blue-green algae samples from the lake several weeks ago.

Unless specific complaints or requests are made, tests for

other chemicals are usually not conducted.

In attempts to find out more about the algae and its affects, the local public health department has been studying reports conducted by York University, Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Ministry of Environment analysts,

Watch for an update on this story in Wednesday's Tribune

Ministry of Health officials and other experts have also been contacted in search of more information. Much of the scientific documentation on the algae's affects have been taken from international files, Kurji suggested.

Kurji said the department is interested in knowing how much algae was given to laboratory mice and for how long. He noted, "many of these experiments cannot be extrapolated to human beings."

He would also like to know what levels of the primitive plant are considered harmful to humans. Until such questions are answered, the health department has no criteria for determining what levels of blue-green algae are harmful to humans. In the meantime, health officials want to discourage all recreational activity in the lake - including fishing. Documentation has revealed cases in which fish have suffered liver damage from consuming the algae, Kurji revealed. The health department intends to ask Ministry of Natural Resources to run tests on Musselman Lake fish, he stated.

"There are a number of questions that really beg to be answered," he added. "I think this whole thing needs to be looked at in greater depth."

Man charged after axe attack

JULIE CASPERSEN
Staff Reporter

A brother and sister were chased out of a Ballantrae convenience store by an axe-wielding man Wednesday afternoon.

The pair went to the store to settle a dispute at 3:20 p.m. Wednesday, said a Musselman Lake woman.

She said her brother, a 28-year-old Markham man, had information about a prior incident of van-

dalism at the variety store but the couple was verbally and physically assaulted by a man behind the counter. The woman said a man slapped her then reached behind the counter for a hatchet, chasing the pair into the parking lot where her brother ran off and she retreated to her car, followed by the axe-brandishing man.

"The windows were down and the doors were unlocked," she said. "He was coming around to where my head was. He said he was going

to kill me."

The 41-year-old woman managed to escape from her Pontiac Trans Am to another store where she called police. Officers arrived at the scene, arrested a man and seized a metal hatchet with a wooden handle. The car was left at the scene overnight with a slashed rear tire and dented by repeated blows from the axe.

"It was scary, believe me. I was shaking for about five hours," she said Thursday.

A 24-year-old Scarborough man of Eglinton Ave. E. was charged with two counts of assault with a weapon, mischief to private property and possession of an offensive weapon.

He is scheduled to appear in a Newmarket courtroom Oct. 15.

Deer Park trial delayed

The preliminary hearing of a Stouffville man charged in connection with the \$1 million fire that gutted a local inn was put over until Nov. 25. The man appeared in Newmarket Provincial Court Sept. 6 for a preliminary hearing, but the case was put over for 11 weeks. The accused turned himself into York Regional Police April 17, the day after the 5 a.m. blaze at the Deer Park Inn. He was charged with arson, break, enter and theft and mischief over \$1,000. Three young offenders were also charged with arson.



Photo/ANNETTE BUCHKOWSKI

Puddle fun

Is there anything more irresistible than a puddle? Ask 14-month old Peter Young, who sat in this one at the entrance to Ludbrook Tree Farm



This car was vandalized this week by a man with an axe.

Trial set in sex assault case

A man accused of sexually assaulting and videotaping a young girl at a Stouffville trailer park will stand trial later this month.

John Bolton, 65, was arrested Aug. 11 at his Rexdale home after a 10-year-old girl was reportedly

invited into the man's Cedar Beach Park trailer at Musselman Lake.

She was allegedly sexually assaulted and videotaped.

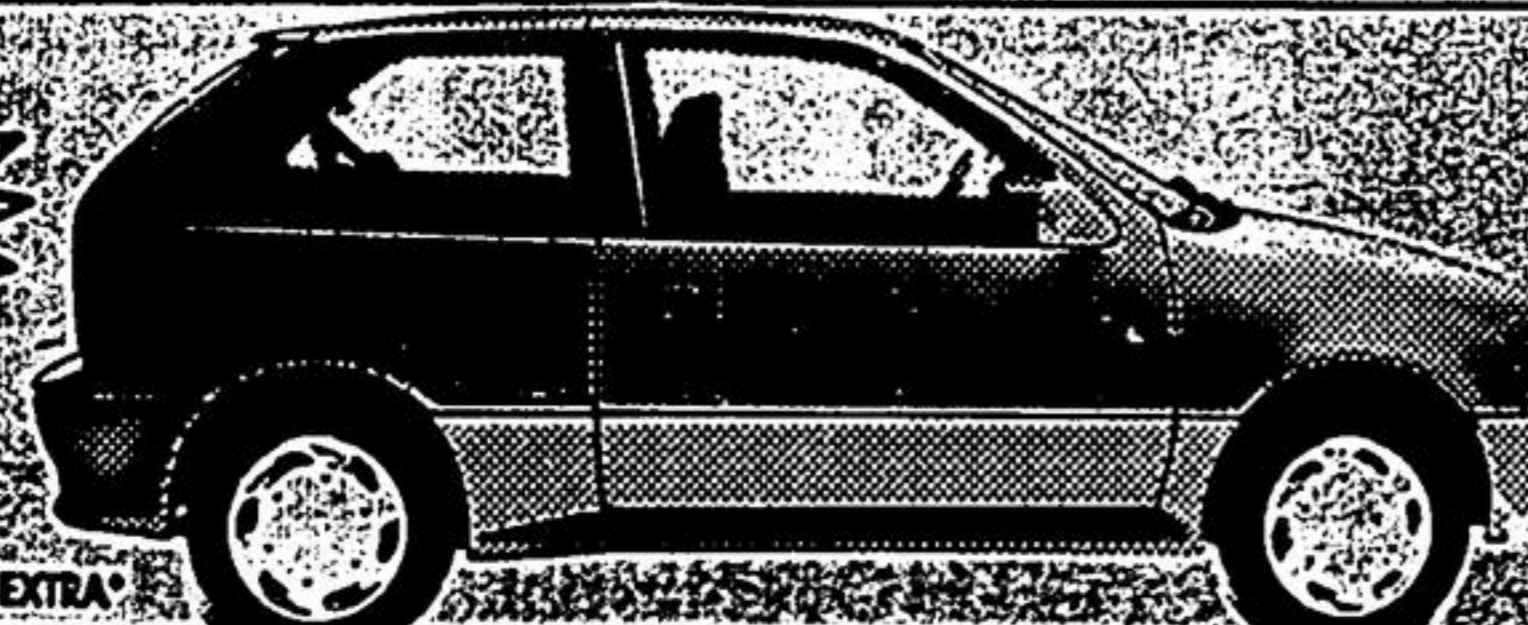
The victim is a Rexdale neighbor of the accused.

Police seized a photo album and a number of tapes from the man's home.

Four girls were identified as victims from the photographs, and police said all girls lived in the west Toronto area.

Bolton will appear in a Newmarket courtroom Sept. 25 on four sexual assault charges, nine counts of sexual interference (sexual activity with a person under 14 years) and one charge of invitation to sexual touching.

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