

Rouge clean-up group fears health hazards

By Teri Banas
staff writer

Organizers of a June 7 field day using volunteers to clean up the Rouge River have asked the Wayne County Health Department to issue a report on potential health hazards.

"Everybody's concerned about it (liability)," said the state Water Resources Commission chairman Jim Murray, a proponent of "Rouge River Day."

"What we might have to do is confine the work to areas of the river that are not in bad shape."

Murray said the report — a "position paper" being compiled by the department's public health division — will address the issue of which locations volunteers should avoid along the 125-mile waterway. It also will give public health tips on exposure to contaminated water.

"WE NEEDED to continue to warn the public," he said.

There are sections, particularly in certain Downriver communities such as Dearborn and Melvindale, that should be entirely avoided, Murray said.



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— James Murray, chairman
Water Resources Commission

"There's no way we're going to use volunteers in Melvindale. The water bubbles, belches and fizzes there. It's a public disgrace."

Foremost among potential health hazards is the level of pathogens, bacterial substances that can cause infections, in the waters.

Also of serious concern are toxins believed to be found mostly in the Downriver area of Wayne County.

BRUCE MONSON, the newly hired director of the Rouge River Watershed Council, made up of community repre-

sentatives from Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties, echoed sentiments he has heard from organizers and volunteers eager to help.

In his governmental role, Monson is pulling together a citizens' advocacy group called "The Friends of the Rouge."

"It's justified that people should be concerned about the sewage overflows and toxic levels in the water," said Monson, a former lakes researcher with a biology background.

"Certainly, everyone is afraid of the Rouge River and then there's the whole

issue of liability when you're talking about sponsoring an activity like this."

Glenn Brown of the Wayne County Health Department was unavailable for comment yesterday.

MURRAY SAID the health report is being requested to help insure that the planned civic event "will be properly handled."

For instance, it should be documented and recognized, he said, that if there is a heavy rain storm just before the planned day, the event will have to be canceled. Rains will bring heavy sewage flows into the river from combined sewer lines called CSOs.

Even without heavy rains, plans should be set that would place volunteer workers away from CSO points because of the potential contact with raw sewage, Murray added.

New attention was put on the Rouge River beginning last fall after a state-led push to organize local governments and residents to act on the pollution issue.

THE 125-MILE river was listed recently as a "Class A" area of concern by the International Commission on the Great Lakes.

State dumping expenses — Headlee

Richard Headlee, chief sponsor of the 1978 tax limitation amendment adopted by Michigan voters, says Michigan political leaders are illegally pushing state costs onto local units of government.

"We're concerned that politicians are not observing the will of the people as described in the State Constitution they are sworn to uphold," said Headlee, president of Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of Farmington Hills.

Joined by Attorney Al Schmidt and Dr. Walter Averill, both of Saginaw, Headlee said Michigan's Constitution prohibits the current state government

practice of misappropriating local school funds and guarantees 1986 refunds to individual taxpayers of several hundred million dollars in excessive taxes collected from them in 1985.

Noting that two county executives have failed suits against Gov. James J. Blanchard's administration, Dr. Averill asked, "Why should anyone have to file suit against their governor, or carry a refund guaranteed each taxpayer by the Constitution? People are supposed to be protected by their constitution."

Last week Wayne County Executive William Lucas and two private business owners filed suit against Gov.

Blanchard in Kent County Circuit Court, seeking \$203 million in refunds for Michigan taxpayers. Their suit charged the state violated the Headlee Amendment in fiscal year 1984-85 by

collecting \$203 million more in revenues than constitutionally allowed.

Lucas is seeking the Republican nomination for governor. Headlee was the 1982 GOP nominee.

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