



Wednesday, September 21, 2005

Media Release

York Region's \$30 million environmental protection and mitigation program provides residents with options regarding poor performing wells

NEWMARKET – The Regional Municipality of York has committed \$30 million to a comprehensive environmental monitoring and mitigation program to assist residents who may be impacted due to Regional infrastructure projects.

York Region continues to ask residents who believe their wells have been impacted by Regional construction in the area surrounding the 16th Avenue Trunk Sewer project to call their toll-free 24-hour hotline – 1-888-445-4418 – to have their individual situation assessed. All calls are returned within four hours and wells are assessed within 24 hours.

The Region established the hotline in fall 2003 as part of a program to ensure that residents affected by temporary local de-watering from the project would have immediate access to potable drinking water until their wells recovered. Thus far, York Region has invested \$7 million to provide new wells, hook residents up to municipal water supplies or modify existing wells.

The environmental monitoring program was established for all York Durham Sewer System (YDSS) projects in summer 2003. The program was developed in consultation with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

The 16th Avenue sewer project involves construction of a 2.4 metre diameter tunnel across 16th Avenue from Woodbine Avenue to 9th Line, and along 9th Line from 16th Avenue to the Boxgrove community. Phase 1 of the project included the 9th Line section of the sewer and 16th Avenue between 9th Line and Stone Mason Drive. Phase 1 was completed in summer 2003. Phase 2 commenced in May 2005 after obtaining all required approvals for work to go forward.

The 16th Avenue project is required to service development identified in the Region's approved Official Plan. It is part of an overall master servicing plan critical to meeting the long-term servicing needs of the Region.

The YDSS is a collection of large, deep, gravity sewers that moves sewage without mechanical pumping from urban areas to the state-of-the-art Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant in Pickering. The YDSS was originally constructed by the Province in the 1970's as the most environmentally-sound means of treating wastewater. The environmental benefits of a gravity-based system are that it is not subject to mechanical failure and has a lifespan of 80 to 100 years.

The construction method employed on the 16th Avenue project requires a temporary lowering of the water table so that the tunnel can be excavated in dry conditions. This dewatering does have an impact on some private wells; however, the water table returns to its normal levels following project construction.

To date, all wells outside of the immediate construction area have recovered to normal levels, as predicted. Wells currently affected are within the immediate construction zone.

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Since the 16th Avenue Trunk Sewer project began, York Region has received calls from more than 475 residents to its well mitigation hotline. Of these calls:

- 146 households were not affected by construction
- 144 called for information
- 68 households have had their wells modified
- 47 households had mechanical failure with their wells unrelated to construction
- 39 households have had their wells replaced
- 21 households have been provided temporary water tanks until well levels recovered
- 11 households have been hooked up to municipal water systems

Numerous factors can contribute to low water levels in wells, including:

- Extended periods of hot and dry weather, as experienced between June and August
- Other water-takers located in the area, including golf courses
- Proliferation of spring-fed ponds
- Improper or infrequent well maintenance
- Mechanical failure

Residents who are not satisfied with the Region's assessment of their wells can request a complaints review process. Under this process, the Region will hire an independent hydrogeologist to work directly for the resident and make a determination whether the Region's de-watering is a factor in their well levels dropping. If de-watering is a factor, the Region initiates mitigation measures based on the data provided by the hydrogeologist.

York Region continues to liaise with the MOE, DFO and the TRCA, in addition to local residents, to ensure that all approved work for the 16th Avenue Phase 2 project meets strict environmental guidelines.

For more information on the 16th Avenue Trunk Sewer project, or on the well mitigation process, please visit the York Region Web site at www.york.ca and follow the front page link titled "York Region Wastewater Infrastructure" projects.

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