

Mr Floatie under attack

KATHERINE GORDON

Will Victoria be the last city on Earth to treat its sewage? Not likely.

A flurry of letters to the newspapers over the last few months have been slamming land-based sewage treatment in the clear hope that some reversal will be achieved, even though Environment Minister Barry Penner responded in March: “The decision to move forward with treatment has already been made.” Opponents, he stated bluntly, are missing the point: “It is my job to look at the overall health of the environment.” Penner has all the evidence he needs that the environment is suffering—end of story, as far as he is concerned.

In that case—especially given that the main criticism is needless cost, that projected costs have already *tripled* to an estimated budget of \$1.2 billion since treatment was first considered in the 1990s, and that further delays are simply going to increase the budget—is there any point to these attempted stalling tactics?

Let’s revisit for a moment why a treatment plan is underway in the first place. By 2006, contamination around the existing outfalls at Clover and Macauley Points from more than a century of pumping untreated sewage into the Strait of Juan de Fuca was bad enough that fish placed in water taken from both sites in repeated tests died within hours. CRD data shows that fecal coliform counts in the surface water above the outfalls exceeded the allowed Health Canada limit of 200 units/100ml 26 times in 2006, frequently reaching into the thousands. The highest level recorded was 3600 units on November 8, 2006 (too bad if you were windsurfing that day).

That’s not all. In recent decades a concentrated cocktail of heavy metals and “COPCs” (chemicals of potential concern such as hair dyes, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and detergents) have been added to the mix flowing out the pipes. Despite Environment Canada stating in 2003 that source control is ineffective, the CRD relies heavily on a source control program for businesses. It has procured some convictions but it is difficult to prevent cost-cutters from “opening up the night valve” to dispose of toxic waste. There is no enforcement regime for domestic households at all.

That’s why the BC Ministry of Environment (MOE) finally stepped into the fray in 2006.

Both outfalls were declared contaminated sites under provincial environmental legislation. The CRD was ordered by Penner to get on with sewage treatment, and the rest is history.

So why the continued resistance? Some of the arguments against treatment are specious at best. Keith Martin’s view, for example, is that in the absence of a cost/benefit analysis,



Will Mr Floatie have to hit the streets again?

the money could be better spent on other priorities. But without the analysis, how would he know? Martin also argues that bringing toxins into the CRD environment via treatment plants would be hazardous both to that environment and to human health. By implication then, dumping those toxins in the ocean must be posing at least the same risk and equally should not be countenanced. And surely we can incorporate protective measures into the treatment plants.

Of course Martin may not have a copy of a briefing note prepared for Liberal Environment Minister David Anderson in March 2003 which reported concerns of Fisheries and Oceans Canada about the CRD’s discharges. “These include,” it states, “frequent effluent surfacing during periods of slack tide thus exceeding contact recreation water standards and contamination of the surface micro-layer of the ocean.”

The briefing note also refers to a 1994 report by a joint BC/Washington marine science panel that stated that the chemicals entering local waters are known to “disrupt endocrine function in marine organisms and humans,

causing impacts as serious or more than those of cancer induction.”

Some credible marine scientists have brought their contrary views to bear in the debate, saying that no irreversible damage is being done to Victoria’s marine environment and that any harm that is occurring is relatively minor. Regional health officers also say no danger to human health is being posed. Many of these scientists and medical experts have been arguing against treatment since the first go round in the 1990s and are still dead set against it.

But up against their views are the dead fish, the appalling coliform counts, and the scientific data from both provincial and federal environment ministries contradicting their statements that no harm is being done. An independent review of the CRD’s waste management plan in 2006 by an equally credible group of scientists (the SETAC report) concluded: “Relying on the dilution and natural dispersion processes of the Strait of Juan de Fuca is not a long-term answer to wastewater disposal.”

The anti-lobby say politics are at play and the treatment plan is just correcting poor optics for Victoria, especially with the 2010 Olympics on the horizon. But those who support treatment are equally concerned about politics. Jim McIsaac at Victoria Sewage Alliance is worried other politicians will jump on Keith Martin’s bandwagon if it looks like he’s gaining ground. Victoria mayor Alan Lowe is stepping down at the next municipal election in November, and he has been one of the biggest advocates for treatment on the CRD.

McIsaac’s also not sure how committed the rest of the CRD is to treatment. Certainly, chair Denise Blackwell is on record as saying treatment is not needed yet. The sense is that the CRD is being brought along for the ride with reluctance at best. Environmental manager Seamus McDonnell says: “We’ve been told to do it so we’re doing it. The whole thrust of our energy is to get the work done in accordance with the Minister’s instructions. We’re moving forward as expeditiously as we can.” Just doing our job, ma’am.

Politically, the CRD certainly seems to be looking for excuses to procrastinate. On April 23 the CRD’s liquid waste committee voted

A passionate advocate for your health

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to stall deciding on the location of treatment plants using the excuse that they could not proceed without seeing a report on waste energy recovery strategies commissioned by Minister of Community Services Ida Chong. But when questioned the previous week on whether that report was crucial to the CRD's progress, McDonnell responded that the CRD's own independent consultants' report on the same issues is in progress.

Moreover, said McDonnell, the Chong report is province-wide in its scope and the CRD wanted an analysis that would apply to this region specifically. Asked if the province has shared the contents of its report with the CRD, McDonnell responded: "Oh yeah, we have sufficient information, we're not operating in the dark. Based on the knowledge of the contents of that report we have we're confident that the work our consultants are doing is going to be compatible with it. We're quite sure of that."

Such deliberate stalling by the CRD is at the considerable expense of taxpayers. The thought of tax hikes may be highly unpopular, but here's another way to analyze the looming costs.

The SETAC report says it's got to happen eventually anyway. Two-thirds of the budget is being proffered *now* by senior governments in cold hard cash. Politics being what it is, there's no guarantee the money would be available further down the track. So if they don't take it now, the CRD's taxpayers could be left paying for the entire cost at some point in the future. Think an annual tax bite of \$400 to cover the cost of sewage treatment is bad? How does \$2,000 sound? They may feel pressured now by their constituents, but lose that \$800 million of provincial and federal cash, and the current CRD board could end up being the most unpopular set of directors in the region's history.

Katherine Gordon is a writer, author and ocean-loving kayaker based on Gabriola Island. Her most recent book is *The Garden that You Are* (Sono Nis).

I have never [before] experienced any doctor caring enough to do follow-up calls or give seminars and information on better living. In one month, I feel better and have less pain, and for the first time in years, I am sleeping through the night," says patient Therese Frei of Victoria.

Rewarding feedback such as this is a daily occurrence for Dr. Cale Copeland, whose obvious enthusiasm for helping people achieve optimum health through regular chiropractic care comes largely from his personal experience of overcoming his own health challenges.

Dr. Copeland is not merely a chiropractor—he's more of a crusader. Years ago, after his transformational experiences as a chiropractic patient, the gift of healing convinced him to change his career. A Registered Nurse, he packed up his family and moved to California to attend the Palmer College of Chiropractic, where he graduated *magna cum laude*.

"I had suffered from asthma, allergies and heartburn most of my life," he explains. "At one point I was on six different medications. When I was 25, I was hit by a car while riding my bike. Although I sought chiropractic care for back pain, I discovered that normalizing nervous system function, which restores the body's amazing healing and self-regulating capacity, has a positive effect on every aspect of health. After approximately six months of regular chiropractic care, my health began to soar. I don't take any medications now. My own experience is what fuels my passion, and why my mission is to share the gift of chiropractic with others so that they, too, can experience wellness."

Even a minor injury or strain can have a very severe effect on our ability to be fully functional, notes Dr. Copeland, because the spinal cord is the main path for our entire nervous system. Any damage to it can lead to a wide variety of complaints

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Victoria Family Chiropractic's Dr. Cale Copeland, Debbie Vermaning (l) and Nancy Balmer.

such as back or neck pains, headaches, shoulder pain, numbness of the extremities, and limited mobility.

A chiropractor focuses on treating the cause of these problems rather than just the symptoms. In addition to chiropractic treatments, Dr. Copeland offers his patients support in the form of weekly one-hour seminars on different facets of stress management and healthy living.

"When beliefs change, then healthy choices follow naturally," he explains. "By becoming advocates for our own well-being, and understanding that the nervous system controls every function in the body, then it follows that we want to maintain proper spinal hygiene. We want to keep that superhighway flowing easily. We don't want traffic jams, and failing health."

Because stress creates a cascade of the body's natural coping systems that eventually cause problems of their own, Dr. Copeland says, "To achieve wellness, we must make adjustments to our beliefs and our lifestyle, so that we get out of the 'stress feedback loop.' This is just as important as adjustments to our spine, and that is why I see my role as an educator, not just a practitioner."

To schedule an appointment please call the office at 592.5553 or for more info visit www.vfchiro.com. Become a passionate advocate for your own well-being—enjoy the benefits of Dr. Cale Copeland's caring and educational approach to achieving optimum health through regular chiropractic care.

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