

## **Board of Health, County Support Township Septic Ordinance**

### **RESOLUTIONS PROVIDE AMMO IN FIGHT WITH STATE**

**By Rosemary Horvath  
Herald Staff Writer**

A Riverdale citizens group earned support from the Board of Health of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department for zeroing in on problematic septic systems in the small Seville Township village, and for coming up with solutions to end bacterial contamination at the grassroots level.

The Board of Health adopted the supportive resolution at its meeting on Nov. 27.

A somewhat similar but modified resolution went before the Gratiot Board of Commissioners on Tuesday and was unanimously passed.

Both documents recognize a commitment to support a Seville Township septic ordinance requiring pumping of septic tanks no more than 10 years out, time of sale septic system inspection, and annual testing of water discharges.

A proposed county resolution had been revised from the month before by County Administrator Tracey Cordes at the direction of the board chairman, George Bailey, also the chair of the Board of Health.

In both cases, the initial request for support was presented by Riverdale resident and citizens committee chairman Bob Lombard who sought the endorsement of both governing boards to include in an engineering analysis to be submitted by Dec. 15 to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy by engineers from Fleis & VanderBrink.

*See FIGHT on page 8*

### **DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICER STILL CAUTIOUS**

*Editor's note: Marcus Cheatham, the health officer for the 3-county Mid Michigan District Health Department, was asked to clarify his comments made at the Nov. 27 Board of Health meeting at which time board members approved a resolution supporting private septic systems in the Seville Township unincorporated village of Riverdale. Rather than pick and choose his explanations, The Herald has printed Cheatham's emailed reply in full that explains his concerns.*

"The main reason there is human E. coli in surface water is because of homes without drain fields. Almost everyone has a tank of some kind, but from there in a



**CHEATHAM**

system that is up to code, septage is supposed to flow into a drain field or some other kind of treatment system where it breaks down so that only water is flowing out of the system.

"To get a permit from the Health Department a household has to have both a tank and a drain field. Today all new construction must have a permit. But what if they never got a permit? For example what if the house was built in the 1950s before our current Environmental Regulation? At that time the health department was not in the business of issuing permits. So they might have built a tank only system or nothing at all. If they never had contact with the health department we would have no idea what they have.

*See CAUTIOUS on page 8*

# Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, November 28, 2019

## **FIGHT** *continued from page 1*

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The township which is under the gun hired the firm to evaluate the status of the Riverdale community in its ability to eliminate failing septic systems and high levels of E. coli registered in catch basins.

EGLE has rejected solutions proposed by the township this year as “inadequate, as failing and inadequate septic systems are resulting in the unlawful discharge of sewage from properties in Riverdale and are contributing to recreational use impairments of the Pine River.”

Lombard and other Riverdale residents are hopeful the engineering report will present solutions other than EGLE's preference for a sanitary wastewater treatment system.

Both the community and township officials are hopeful to avoid not only a multi-million construction project even when state and federal grant dollars are made available.

Both resolutions recognize that “private septic systems in rural Michigan provide long term, cost-effective, environmental safe onsite sewage treatment solutions...”

Also recognized is the responsibility of individual property owners to provide proper maintenance and care of their systems, along with the oversight of the local agencies and township.

The Board of Health resolution urges EGLE to allow residents to have private systems and to recognize the falsehoods stated in an earlier engineering study from 2015. The truth is Riverdale does have adequate soils, suitable lot parcels for drain fields, and does not have “mass direct connections” into drains.

In an email reply Monday, Lombard called the previous engineering report “was worth little more than toilet paper because the reasons it used to justify a municipal sewer system were wholly untrue or inaccurate.”

Lombard went on to express appreciation that the boards “recognized the financial sacrifices and environmental stewardship property owners committed to by voluntarily getting disconnected from the storm drains and being placed on a pump and haul status” until a new private onsite septic system is installed.

He also expressed gratitude for state lawmakers Senator Rick Outman and Rep. Jim Lower for offering additional support. Volunteers with the Healthy Pine River, another citizens group intent on improving water quality, also has been helpful with taking water samples on a regular basis.

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## **CAUTIOUS** *continued from page 1*

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“This is what we were trying to fix by amending our Regulation last year. We wanted to make it so everyone would have to disclose to us what kind of system they have. I'm sorry that did not work out.

“We have good digital records of every transaction we have with the public related to septic. When we say we “don't have a record” we mean that household has never been to the health department to get a permit so there is no file on that parcel. Our current Regulation does not empower us to go door to door checking on systems without a reason. We can knock on doors if there is a problem of some kind, like feces in a drain, but we need a reason.

“In the case of Riverdale, we have 60 homes where we either have nothing on file at all, or they started but did not complete the permitting process. So we don't know what they have.

“This is why at the November 27th Board of Health meeting I said that if the Board wants to take a position against sewers because they believe it is too expensive, that is one thing. But as Health Officer I could not say that the E. coli problem has been fixed.

“I'm happy with the work the Riverdale citizens did cleaning up some of the worst violators. But we still don't know about the others.

“I'm glad the Board of Health supported creating the new Environmental Health Educator position in the Department. The role of the Environmental Health Educator will be to try to get out in front of this problem. They will study water tests to identify E. coli hot spots and then try to find the sources of the pollution. This will go very slowly because there are dozens of places across our three counties with lots of homes without permits. Without a stronger Regulation, it is the best we can do.”

# Daily News

Friday, December 20, 2019

## Illness: the gift no one wants

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan  
District Health Department

The season of gift giving and gift receiving is well underway. While most people enjoy receiving a thoughtful gift, no one wishes to be gifted an illness, especially around the holidays.

Two illnesses are especially bothersome this time of year: norovirus and influenza. Most people are familiar with these terms, but many aren't sure what the difference is. Knowing what causes these illnesses, what can be done to prevent them, and what symptoms to watch out for, can help ensure you stay illness free.

Norovirus (what some people refer to as the "stomach flu") is extremely contagious. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, headache, body pain, and fever. It usually starts within 12 to 48 hours of exposure and lasts one to three days. The virus is found both in the stool and vomit of the ill person. Norovirus is very hardy and able to survive outside the human body and capable of infecting others for up to several weeks.

Influenza (commonly called "the flu") is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and in severe cases, even death. Influenza typically starts sud-

denly, one to four days after being exposed. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, severe body aches, tiredness, headache and chills. Many people think that diarrhea and vomiting is a symptom of influenza, but this is rarely the case. Influenza is spread when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person land in the mouth or nose of those nearby. The virus can also spread when someone touches droplets that have landed on an object and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands. The flu virus can survive outside the body up to 24 hours. People who are infected are contagious for a day before they start to feel sick. For these reasons, prevention is key.

Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent both norovirus and influenza. People should wash their hands often, especially after using the restroom, changing diapers, before eating, and after blowing their nose or coughing into their hands.

Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing will go a long way to prevent illness. If a tissue isn't available, cough and sneeze into the bend of your elbow.

Vaccination is the best way to protect oneself from getting influenza. It can also reduce the severity of symptoms if you do

get sick. A yearly flu vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months.

Children who get severely ill or die from the flu typically have no underlying health problems, but are unfortunately not vaccinated. It takes up to two weeks after the vaccine is given before the body builds up enough immunity to prevent the flu, so residents are advised to get vaccinated right away before flu activity increases. It's important to note that the vaccine will not give you influenza because it is made with inactivated, or killed virus.

Those wishing to get the flu vaccine can do so at their doctor's office, most pharmacies or at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department by calling (989) 831-5237 in Montcalm County.

To prevent further spread of illness, it is important for adults to stay home from work when they are ill and to keep sick kids home from school and daycare. Those with influenza or flu-like symptoms should stay home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Individuals infected with a norovirus-type illness should not return to school or work until free of symptoms such as diarrhea for at least two days (48 hours).

# National Guard to test Grand Ledge wells

## Pond, well on-site had high levels of PFAS

**Craig Lyons** Lansing State Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

GRAND LEDGE – The Michigan National Guard will start testing well water around its Grand Ledge facility for PFAS to rule out any risk of contamination.

Early water testing at the Grand Ledge facility did not find per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, in groundwater wells along West Eaton Highway. The guard wants to screen neighboring wells to confirm those results.

“We don’t have a real reason to be super concerned,” said Jonathan Edgerly, an environmental manager with the Michigan Army National Guard, adding the guard doesn’t have enough data to say no risk exists.

The National Guard will sample 14 wells south of the Grand Ledge facility. Edgerly said testing could start in January if contractors get access to those properties.

“We are trying to move as fast as possible,” Edgerly said. A retention pond on the site had PFO concentration at 141 parts per trillion, more than twice the limit required for cleanup. Water from the pond goes into the Reed Drain, a large drainage ditch that runs behind the National Guard facility.

One shallow groundwater well had a combined total of 113 parts per trillion of PFAS.

If classes of PFAS exceed 70 parts per trillion, the state requires cleanup.

Groundwater well tests at the southern edge of the facility did not detect PFAS. Groundwater flows southwest away from the facility.

“At this point, we don’t have evidence of PFAS leaving the site,” Edgerly said.

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy tested Grand Ledge’s municipal water supply and no PFAS was found in the drinking water.

The guard’s Grand Ledge facility drew the state’s attention because the historic storage and possible use of aqueous film-forming foam.

The facility housed a firefighting unit during the 1980s until it was disbanded in the 1990s. Records showed the aqueous film-forming foam was stored at the facility and possibly used for training.

**See WELLS, Page 4A**

# Wells

Continued from Page 1A

James Crowley, manager of the environmental restoration program with the Michigan National Guard, said the investigation into PFAS at the site is still in the early stages.

To get better data on PFAS in the groundwater, the guard tried to drill deeper on site but mechanical failures forced it to find another option. Crowley said the guard decided to test neighboring well systems.

“That’s the quickest way to get the information,” Crowley said.

Contact reporter Craig Lyons at 517-377-1047 or [calyons@lsj.com](mailto:calyons@lsj.com).



**The Michigan National Guard’s Grand Ledge Aviation Readiness Center pictured on Nov. 13.**

MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

## ***Public Health Servant Recognized for Decades of Duty***

**By Rosemary Horvath  
Herald Staff Writer**

Epidemiologist Norm Keon's cramped office in Ithaca may not have wall space for the unusually large framed State of Michigan Proclamation signed by Governor Whitmer and Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II.

But Keon's 50 years guiding public health programs entirely in Michigan and his many projects required a lengthy proclamation.

All his contributions were highlighted during a tribute at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health

meeting Dec. 18.

Health Officer Marcus Cheatham in offering Keon congratulations also recognized his guidance and persuasion. "He has pushed me and I've done better because of it," said the health department administrator.

Keon spoke of his personal influencers as well. "My mother and her mother showed me you take care of people. Be good to people," is the lesson he learned, he said, adding that those in his profession "prevent diseases and make a difference in people's lives."

*See KEON on page 8*



**Epidemiologist Norm Keon (Left) and Health Officer Marcus Cheatham**

# Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, December 26, 2019

## **KEON** *continued from page 1* \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning in 2001, the St. Louis resident and Alma College graduate has been the epidemiologist for the MMDHD, the Central Michigan District Health Department and the District Health Department #10.

Altogether, these three departments represent 19 counties in West and Central Michigan and share the services of both the epidemiologist and the Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse.

Keon's career began as a public health advisor with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A few years later, he was named field representative in the Tuberculosis Control Program for the Michigan Department of Public Health. Not long after that, he was named department chief. He was responsible for various programs and later worked in the area of communicable disease.

Keon made time to instruct nursing students and personnel of local health departments.

Mari Pat Terpenang, a former co-worker of his from Central Michigan DHD, said it had been Keon's supervision in the communicable disease programs that made her a better professional. The retired nursing supervisor thanked Keon for impacting her life and career. In turn, Keon recognized the contributions of the nursing profession. "Nurses are the epitome of public health," he said.

As for his retirement, Keon said he doesn't know when that may happen.

"Fifty years snuck up on me," he said, seated later at his office desk.

Compelled to "spread the word on public health," Keon pulls a paperback catalog from the shelf about four inches thick. The publication is published by the American Public Health Association every five years. Early in his career, a booklet was half the thickness.

"It isn't because of new diseases, although there are some, it's just that there is more information for disease," he explained.

Epidemiology by definition is the study and analysis of the distribution, patterns, and determinants of health and disease conditions in defined populations.

"I see cases coming in all day long from the 19 counties," he said, pointing to the computer. Information is forwarded to him by hospital infection nurses and laboratories such as the Mayo Clinic. These electronic records hit the health department system.

Keon designed the first electronic surveillance and reporting tool used by local health departments for tracking and reporting communicable diseases.

He has been a faithful advisor of the Pine River Citizens Task Force and continues to advocate for a comprehensive health study on the effects of PBB on Michiganders. The CAG has partnered with Emory University to have events around the state, including Gratiot County, where residents are tested for traces of PBB in blood samples.

## **Township Hopeful its Third Answer to Unlawful Septic Discharges is Enough**

By Rosemary Horvath  
Herald Staff Writer

A deluge of written promises from Seville Township officials and Riverdale supporters has landed before Christmas in the Lansing office of the Water Resources Division of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

Genesis of their pledges is to dissuade EGLE from ordering "appropriate enforcement actions" such as a sanitary collection and treatment system for the Riverdale area to correct ongoing "unlawful discharge of sewage from properties in Riverdale...(that) are contributing to recreational use impairments of the Pine River."

This violation has been repeated in three violation notices EGLE has directed at Seville Township.

The township had until Dec. 15 to submit a final remedy for "failing and inadequate septic systems...resulting in the unlawful discharge of sewage from properties in Riverdale."

This violation had been cited in the initial violation notice of June 13, 2019.

Neither the first nor second reply has suited EGLE's expectations that "At a minimum, the response shall include a long-term strategy, with a schedule of dates, to address the discharge of sewage from failing and inadequate septic systems in Riverdale."

The township and Riverdale property owners have high hopes for the third attempt.

Support letters from Senator Rick Outman, Rep. Jim Lower, along with resolutions from the Board of Health for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, and the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners are intended to bolster the township's stand.

The intent is to monitor private septic systems, some of which will be new, which should be enough to solve the issue now and in the future.

The township board hired the Midland engineering firm of Fleis & Vandenbrink to review the situation. Senior Project Manager Louis Taylor also has recommended the same five promises outlined in all the documents. If these are carried out, Taylor indicated, then "there would be no need for a municipal sewage treatment and collection system for Riverdale."

The opposite was presented by another engineer-

ing firm hired by the then-township board.

The Spicer Group in 2015 indicated "the direct connections/pollution sources...cannot be remedied through proper septic system maintenance alone given lack of available land for new fields, poor soil conditions, and systems not built to code."

Spicer recommended a grinder pump collection system with a lagoon treatment system.

Members of a Riverdale citizens committee that have single-handedly investigated the polluters and weighed the alternatives, dispute findings by the Spicer Group. They have been advised by experts that the soil is acceptable and that there is available land for new fields.



MALLORY

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*Neither the first nor second reply has suited EGLE's expectations*

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In her letter dated Dec. 13, 2019, Seville Township Supervisor Tish Mallory explicitly states the township has been "diligently working with community residents, MMDHD, the Gratiot County Drain Commission, the Gratiot County Road Commission, and other volunteer groups..."

She indicates the goal has been to identify and disconnect residential and commercial buildings from the storm drains.

Even though the Riverdale issue has been percolating for years under different township boards, Mallory admitted it wasn't until the board had become formally notified of the issue on Dec. 11, 2018, that diligent attention began.

Among the short term and long term promises, the township intends to establish a septic district for the unincorporated village of Riverdale. There will be a septic ordinance enacted within 12 months requiring mandatory pumping of all septic systems between seven and 10 years. And there will be semi-annual water testing of storm drains and a Time of Transfer inspection of a septic system when a property changes ownership.

Cheri Meyer, Acting WRD District Supervisor, informed the Herald in mid-December her department is reviewing Seville Township's submission "and will be providing comments to the Township once our review is complete."

Meyer added that the response will be available on the MiWaters website and available to the public.

# Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, December 26, 2019

## Velsicol Chemical Plant Site EPA Cleanup Update

### **Velsicol Plant Site - In-place Thermal Treatment**

The heating for the first phase of Area 2 continues. Heating began in early Oct. 2019 and the soil temperature is currently about 50 degrees Celsius (halfway to target temperature of 100 degrees Celsius or 212 degrees Fahrenheit). It is expected the soil will reach 100 degrees Celsius around February 2020. Heating will continue for at least 90 days after the soil temperature reaches 100 degrees Celsius. About 350 pounds of contaminants have been treated to date and much more contaminants are expected to be treated as the temperature of the soil rises. It is expected this first phase of heating for Area 2 will be completed this summer/fall and the second phase of heating Area 2 will likely begin in November 2020 and be completed in the fall of 2021.

Comparing the current heating of Area 2 Phase 1 to the completed Area 1 show at similar timeframes the concentration of chemicals in the vapor phase are higher now than during the Area 1 heating.

The drilling continues for Phase 2 of Area 2 and is about 65% complete. Some 448 holes will need to be drilled for the equipment and wells for the Phase 2 wellfield. Drilling is expected to be completed in May 2020. The expected completion of in-place thermal treatment for Area 2 is fall 2021.

### **Velsicol Plant Site - Design Investigations**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has completed the installation of the evaluation

equipment for the slurry wall, and monitoring continues for groundwater levels both inside and outside the slurry wall. EPA also began the dye study, which will also help to evaluate the performance of the slurry wall. This work will also provide additional information on the design of the water treatment plant and provide additional groundwater sampling and elevation data.

### **Pine River Downstream Study**

EPA and its contractor, Jacobs, are finishing the ecological study for the downstream area. Upon completion of the study, Jacobs will complete a report on cleanup options for the upstream section of the Pine River below the St. Louis dam, known as "Operable Unit 3" or OU3. The cleanup options will focus on removal of contamination from the most heavily impacted floodplains.

In addition, EPA and Jacobs continue monitoring the field pilot study using an activated carbon technology for potential application in the section of the Pine River that is farther downstream and appears less affected by contamination. This section is called OU4. The results of the field pilot study will be incorporated into a second feasibility study for OU4. Alma College is performing supporting work using Solid Phase Micro-Extraction (SPME), which is a specialized test to assess how animals in the ecosystem absorb chemicals like DDT. That absorption process is known as "bioavailability." In early November, the first sampling of worms after the carbon application was completed.

# Daily News

Monday, January 13, 2020

## Mid-Michigan District Health Department offers free radon testing

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) is encouraging residents to test their homes for radon and is offering free test kits to those living in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties.

Exposure to radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. According to Liz Braddock, MMDHD environmental health division director, if you breathe radon, it will increase your chances for developing lung cancer.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas in the environment that can rise to dangerous levels in homes, especially in the winter when windows remain closed.

Radon forms when small amounts of radium and uranium start to break down in the ground. It then enters homes through cracks in walls, basement floors, foundations and other openings. The gas becomes dangerous when it gets trapped indoors and builds to high levels. Any home, new or old, could have a radon problem. This invisible gas has no smell and causes no immediate symptoms, so testing is the only way to know if radon has invaded your home.

Get your free test kit by contacting the MMDHD in Stanton at (989) 831-3607.

For more information, visit [www.epa.gov/radon](http://www.epa.gov/radon) online.