

Victoria sewage treatment – a history of inaction

Mid 1960 - Victoria's beaches are covered with feces as multiple outfalls discharge sewage directly at shoreline. Decision made to combine outfalls and pump 300 meters offshore;

Late 1960's - Victoria makes the decision to install long outfall pipes (1000 meters) instead of building a treatment plant;

Early 1970's - Victoria builds long outfall pipes;

Mid 1970's - Victoria installs screens after sewage white fish are found on the shores of San Juan Island, USA;

Late 1980's - Hartland landfill leachate is diverted to sewer lines after the leachate killed 2 creeks, 1 lake and 1 inlet;

Early 1990's - study concludes that CRD can create a sewer use bylaw that allows landfill leachate into sewers. Same study says the leachate must be treated if it was pumped directly into the ocean;

1992 - CRD referendum on sewage treatment. Three options/taxpayer cost per year: source control/\$4, primary/\$231 or secondary/\$336. Treatment cost estimates were questionably high and effectiveness of source control was the promoted beyond ability to deliver. Still treatment captured 43% of votes;

Early 1993 - Boycott launched against Victoria's tourism sector in response to the no treatment vote. Conferences cancelled at Victoria Conference Center and hotel bookings lost;

1993 - BC Premier Harcourt & Washington Governor Lowry sign agreement with Victoria to install primary treatment by 2002 and secondary by 2008;

1993 - CRD writes BC minister committing to install secondary treatment within 25 years;

2000 - CRD submits a 25 year Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP), removing the commitment to treatment just prior to submitting;

2002 - Environment Canada study shows health risks and environmental risk from Victoria's raw sewage discharge;

2003 - BC Government approves the CRD's LWMP with no plan for treatment. This essentially kills the 1993 agreement with Washington State;

2004 - Markovic study shows extensive heavy metal contamination from Victoria's outfalls.

Today

120 million liters of raw sewage a day pumped into ocean at entrance to Victoria harbour;

A 40 sq. km. area around the outfalls is closed to all shellfish harvest;

The southern resident killer whale, which frequents the area, is listed as endangered;

Sewage plume reaches surface at least 8 months of year;

Oil and grease reaches the surface most days;

Surface Fecal Coliform levels at times exceed recreational standards by over 1400% (2900CFU/100ml);

Fecal Coliform contamination (an indicator of sewage pollution) extends 2.5 km from the outfall;

There is a potential health risk to recreational users such as windsurfers, kayakers and sports fishers who use the waters near the outfalls;

Sediment quality environmental protection guidelines are exceeded daily on the seabed around the outfalls;

The tide carries the surface sewage plume towards the Esquimalt Lagoon shoreline;

The CRD's source control program continues with limited capacity to remove pathogens, heavy metals and many toxic chemicals from the waste stream.