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Pollution of Irondequoit Bay with Diesel Fuel or Fuel Oil*

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POLLUTION OF IRONDEQUOIT BAY WITH DIESEL FUEL OR FUEL OIL

On the afternoon of September 9, Dr. Thomas Bannister noticed a very strong smell of petroleum (Diesel fuel or fuel oil) at the Rochester Canoe Club. He then sailed to the west end of the site of the construction of the Highway 104 expressway bridge, where he found a thick layer of oil on the water for several hundred feet to the south. Construction workers were active on a barge at the site.

On the afternoon of September 15, Mr. Don Martin, 162 Schnackel Drive, Irondequoit, and his neighbor, Mr. Richard Austin, noticed that a large portion of Irondequoit Bay was covered with a layer of what appeared to be Diesel fuel or fuel oil; they took several samples of water and oil from the polluted area of the Bay. The location of the slick and the direction of the wind suggested that this pollutant probably originated at the site of the construction of the expressway bridge. On a barge at this site Martin and Austin observed a large green oil tank from which a hose ran to a pump; another hose ran from the pump into the water of the Bay.

Dr. Wilson visited the area the next morning (September 16); and examined the samples and what was left of the oil slick. Just south of Inspiration Point there was a thin oil slick roughly one to two acres in area, and there was a very strong "keroseny" odor similar to that of Diesel fuel. According to Martin and Austin, the bulk of the slick had dissipated; since Diesel fuel evaporates fairly readily this was expected. Wilson observed large numbers of dead insect larvae in or just under the iridescent film on the surface of the water. This slick was located about a quarter of a mile south of the expressway bridge construction site.

We note that discharge of material such as kerosene, gasoline, and Diesel fuel into a relatively small and enclosed body of water can create serious fire hazards. This is particularly important in view of the dense population of portions of the Bay shore and the heavy usage of the Bay by pleasure boats. The disastrous effects of heavier oils on recreational beaches and on waterfowl are only too well-known, brought home most dramatically by the Recent Torrey Canyon disaster off the southern coast of England, which ruined the beaches of Cornwall and brought death to hundreds of thousands of sea birds.

Marinas, power boat operators, and construction firms working in the Bay should be aware that the discharge of petroleum products into the Bay constitutes serious pollution, and results in hazards and nuisances. Furthermore, it also causes the death of many aquatic insects and insect larvae, upon which fish feed. We hope that improved house-keeping procedures by power boat owners, marina operators, and especially construction workers will result in the elimination of this type of pollution from the Bay in the future.

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