

Creativity May Be the Solution to Pollution of the Jordan River

By John Richter, Friends of the Jordan River Watershed

A combination of thinking outside the box, problem solving with creativity, considering alternative partners, and just plain using common sense led the Friends of the Jordan River Watershed and the newly formed POWER Coalition (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources) to a proposed alternative for the disposal for toxic leachate.

Luxury lakeshore homes were built atop abandoned cement factory kiln dust, which now seeps pollutants, or leachate, into Lake Michigan. Leachate, a caustic substance formed when water passes through cement kiln dust (CKD), as strong as household bleach has been found seeping at several locations into Lake Michigan at Bay Harbor and East Park since 2004. Deposits of CKD, a waste product from the cement plant that once operated in the area, remain beneath portions of the upscale resort and adjacent township park.

The company's cleanup plan involves collecting water and taking it to Grand Traverse County's sewage treatment plant, cleaning some of the water while leaving a condensed amount of contaminated water that taken to a commercial disposal well in Montmorency County. To control clean-up costs, CMS is seeking to develop an injection well of its own through its Beeland Group affiliate to handle disposal. The proposed well site is about five miles east of Alba in Antrim County's Star Township and about 30 miles from Bay Harbor.

The Friends of the Jordan River Watershed oppose the well based on the risk of contamination to the ground water that is a significant source of the Jordan River and the risk of contamination to drinking water supplies. More than 500 people signed on Friends of the Jordan River's letter requesting denial of the permit for the well from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

CMS has received permits for the injection well in Alba from the US EPA and the MDEQ. The permits have been appealed by Star Township and an appeal for the permits are being processed.

In the meantime, another nearby cement company, St. Mary's in Charlevoix has expressed interest in using the leachate in their production process recycling what is now a waste into a resource.

Dirk Cox, spokesman for St. Mary's reported in the "Charlevoix Courier" stated that "CMS Land Company and St. Marys are continuing to have very productive conversations,"

Cox added quoted in the Courier article stated that, "St. Marys was invited to meet with the Friends of the Jordan team also, and at this point all three parties seem to agree that the concept of us using a portion of the Bay Harbor water in our process is worth pursuing. We hope to combine the contaminants in our product, and that way it will end

up in someone's driveway somewhere, which really is the safest place for it to be," Cox said. "Still, we need to run tests to make sure it will end up that way and not get sent out in a smoke stack somewhere."

St. Mary's Cement is located in Charlevoix is less than 12 miles from Bay Harbor which would greatly reduce the cost of transporting the waste.

Although there are still many questions that need to be answered before St. Mary's can potentially use the leachate—the fact that they are interested, opens new doors and changes the whole dynamic. I am hopeful that there is a chance to use some common sense to clean up Bay Harbor—using waste for a resource.

As Star Township awaits the outcome of their appeal, new ideas, creativity, and common sense may make the need for the injection well obsolete.

For more information, contact Friends of the Jordan River at 231-536-9947 or foj@friendsofthejordan.org.