

Water pollution - everybody's business

Everyone who visits or lives on Cape Cod depends, for water, on the single aquifer underlying the land portions of our peninsula and visible to us as ponds, lakes, streams, and swamps. Protecting our water-source quality is not only vital to our economy, but to everyone's health.

Until fairly recently, Cape Codders all had private wells and independent sewer systems. Wastes, filtered through our sandy soils, did little or no damage to water quality until population densities, particularly in Hyannis, endangered well waters. With that threat, a sewer plant was built there and parts of that village were sewerred.

Soon after, public water systems were piped to some residential areas of the town; other people continued to draw water from their private wells and to use septic tanks and cesspools for waste disposal. That is the present situation.

As the town continued to grow, and as housing units sprang up in pine woods and oak groves, demand came for a larger sewer plant. After study, town meeting approved the plan. Troubles began from the time construction was initiated. And troubles continue.

Most severely affected are businesses and residences in

close proximity to the sewer plant, but inasmuch as we are all drawing from the same water source, all Cape Codders are at risk.

The plume of pollution from the sewer plant now flows primarily toward the sea, following a natural drainage path. As building continues, more sewage is generated. Even those people who still have septic tanks or cesspools use the plant, for when their systems must be pumped, the contents are delivered to the sewer plant.

Pollutants in our ground water, although most highly-concentrated in the plume, are being dispersed throughout the Cape's entire water supply.

Between the plant and the sea, directly in the path of the plume, live residents of Mitchell's Way. This neighborhood is still dependent for water on private wells. Although Barnstable Water Company supplies water to many parts of Hyannis from wells located near Independence Park, costs to expand its delivery system to serve the neighborhood which is most affected are prohibitive.

Applications made by the town for state and federal funds to expand the water supply system have been denied.

Most of the homes on Mitchell's Way were built prior to expansion of the sewer plant; residents had no water-quality problems until after enlargement of the plant. Clearly, the source of pollution is the sewer plant.

Recent proposals to remedy the problem include arranging long-term loans to raise money to enable Barnstable Water Company to extend its lines to Mitchell's Way . . . the loans to be repaid by the neighborhood's residents.

Not only does this inflict a financial burden upon a small number of citizens, it fails to address the town's responsibility for polluting the water through its own direct action in expanding the sewer plant in an area where pre-existing homes lay in direct path of drainage. Taxpayers of all seven villages shared in the cost of sewer expansion; all utilize the facility.

Inasmuch as the town's action caused the problem, taxpayers of the entire town, rather than only the residents presently being affected seriously, should share in the expense of correcting the problem and providing pure water to those citizens of Barnstable who live in the area.

Just as important is putting an end to the pollution of everyone's water.