

PORTAGE COUNTY COMBINED GENERAL HEALTH DISTRICT

**LAKE ERIE PROTECTION FUND
LEPF 99-11
FINAL REPORT**

The Cuyahoga River Basin lies predominately within four Ohio counties of which Portage County is one. The river begins in Geauga County, flows downstream through Portage County, turns westward and northward and continues downstream through Summit and Cuyahoga Counties to ultimately empty into Lake Erie.

Portage County is the last of the seven (7) counties that are within the Lake Erie Watershed that is to implement a House Bill 110 inspection program. The House Bill 110 program deals with semipublic wastewater systems which are discharge disposal systems that treat the sanitary wastewater discharged from publicly and privately owned buildings or places of assemblage, recreation, correction, entertainment, education, housing, hospitalization or employment; but does not include a disposal system that treats wastewater in amounts of more than twenty-five thousand gallons per day. Historically, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) inspected less than five percent of semipublic facilities in Portage County.

An active semipublic wastewater management system was lacking in Portage County to oversee the existing semipublic treatment facilities, many of which were highly likely to be failing and contributing to the degradation of the water in the Cuyahoga River Basin. Consequently that impacts the status of Lake Erie along with its inhabitants who utilize that water for recreational and consumption purposes. Over half of Portage County's water drains into Lake Erie through the Cuyahoga River, headwaters of the Aurora branch of the Chagrin River and Grand River, Blackbook, Breakneck, Congress Lake outlet, Potter Creek, Plum Creek, Fish Creek, Tinkers Creek, Wahoo Ditch Wingfoot Lake outlet and the Little Cuyahoga River.

As may be detected from the preceding, there is a sizeable impact on Lake Erie from Portage County's nonpoint sources of pollution. Additionally, according to studies done via the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency as well as the city of Akron Water Supply staffs, the Portage County section of the Cuyahoga River Basin is not in FULL compliance with all of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's adopted biological criteria of the Ohio Water Quality Standards regulations effective May 1990. That criteria consists of numeric values for the Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) and Modified Index of Well-Being (MIWB), both of which are based on fish, and for the Invertebrate Community Index (ICI), which is based on macroinvertebrates. Those criteria along with chemical and whole effluent toxicity evaluation methods, figure prominently in the assessment of Ohio's surface water resources.

The Cuyahoga River, along with the other waters draining into Lake Erie via Portage County, need protection so that they may continue to serve the needs of the people that live, work and play in the watershed.

It is for these reasons that it was imperative that the Portage County Health District initiate an effective semipublic wastewater system inspection program.

The objectives of the Portage County Health District were to undertake in utilizing the requested seed monies to locate and evaluate the existing semipublic wastewater systems in Portage County which have never been inspected or have been inspected on a limited basis. Following this process, the health department was to educate the owners of the semipublic wastewater systems in Portage County on the proper operation and maintenance procedures of their wastewater system. Any semipublic wastewater system found to be in non-compliance with Ohio Environmental Protection Agency standards will be cited for non-compliance and action will be pursued to assure correction.

Additionally, the Health District will provide a seminar accenting Ohio Lake Erie Office's and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's partnerships with the Lake Erie Basin Counties that will provide information on the progress made, present status/future direction of those projects funded by them to improve either directly or indirectly the water quality of Lake Erie.

The goals are:

1. Improved water quality of the Cuyahoga River Basin and Lake Erie.
2. Improved education of property owners on proper operation and maintenance of semipublic wastewater systems which have never been inspected on a regular basis; and,
3. Quicker response/corrective action to identify and remediate failing wastewater systems.
4. License and annually inspect all semipublic wastewater systems less than 25,000 gallons per day.
5. Advance Ohio environmentalist, biologist and others knowledge of Lake Erie/Lake Erie Basin water quality and status of Lake Erie Basin semipublic sewage systems via the information received at the "SemiPublic Wastewater System Partnerships to Protect Lake Erie" seminar.

To accomplish these goals the Health District has taken the following steps:

1. The Health District has created a position to deal solely with the responsibilities of the SemiPublic Wastewater Program. This position has been filled with a registered sanitarian that is certified as a Class I Wastewater Plant Operator.
2. The sanitarian has inventoried all semipublic wastewater plants in Portage County. (See Appendix A)

3. Provide GPS coordinators for all semipublic plants.
4. Establish effective inspection fees to perpetuate the program.
5. The sanitarian has evaluated and inspected all semipublic plants and will continue to do so on an annual basis.
6. During inspections, the sanitarian provides ongoing education to all operators and/or owners that express an interest in this service.
7. Provide an educational seminar to semipublic wastewater system operators and public health sanitarians in Northeastern Ohio. (See Appendix B)
8. We have worked closely with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Northeast District Office. Joint inspections are accomplished at least bi-monthly or when necessary.

The lone goal that has not been established is the development of a website for the semipublic program. The Portage County Health District has not yet developed its own website. When this is accomplished, a portion of the website will be dedicated to the SemiPublic Inspection Program.

By the end of the second year, the program was self-sustaining. Fees generated through this program support its staff and maintenance. Without the seed money provided by the Lake Erie Protection Fund, this could not have been accomplished.

Nearly thirty percent of the systems inspected have been shown to be failing or in disrepair on the first round of inspections. There has already been an improvement over last years' inspections. We expect the improvement to continue.

Thanks to the Lake Erie Protection Fund, Portage County's rivers and streams will continue to improve in quality.

Respectfully submitted,



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