

Discharging pool and hot tub water subject to new education campaign ? but new rules are delayed

By Brock Weir

The cool, fall weather is here and as you start to think about unpacking your coats and sweaters, you're probably starting to think about packing away what's left of the pool season.

If you haven't already closed your swimming pool or hot tub for the fall, consider how you're disposing of the water.

Council has voted to reinforce an education campaign outlining best practices for discharging pool and hot tub water into the environment.

A campaign found on the municipal website, it will focus on the appropriate discharge methods for chlorine and salt water pools and hot tubs.

According to municipal policy, chlorine pools should be discharged into the storm sewer following a de-chlorination process, while salt water pools should be discharged directly into the sanitary sewer system or hauled away. As an alternative, water can be emptied onto private property, ensuring water is absorbed into the ground and no running towards homes.

Council, however, fell short of tightening up policies on how these guidelines might be enforced.

Going into September's General Committee meeting, Council members faced a recommendation to tighten up the Town's existing Sewer Use bylaws to include discharge limits restricting chlorine, bromine, copper, salt and other factors to protect fish and aquatic life in local watercourses, propose new enforcement strategies on pool water discharge, and designate a Provincial Offences Officer to enforce the bylaw.

In June 2016, staff received approval from the Ontario Court of Justice for set fines at \$300 per offence, said Christina Nagy-Oh, Program Manager, Environmental Initiatives, for the Town of Aurora in a report to Council. In the process of updating the Sewer Use Bylaw, staff will need to consider if the set fines also need updating. At present, the Regional Municipality of York's Sewer Use Bylaw will continue to supersede Aurora's new Bylaw at points of conflict. York Regional Bylaw staff will continue to partner with both Town Operations and Town bylaw staff to ensure a standardized approach to sewer control and enforcement.

Aurora's Sewer Use Bylaw will be administered on a complaint basis by the Town Operational Services Department. Both Bylaw and Operational Services will provide continuous education for residents through web postings and door knockers. If Operational Services identifies a need for further enforcement, Bylaw Services staff will assist in ensuring the matter is brought before the courts, where applicable.

Council, however, fell short of taking this last step. Instead, they voted to refer the bylaw back to staff after issues of enforcement were raised around the table.

My issue with that bylaw on pool water discharge is that it is probably one of the most difficult bylaws to enforce, contended Councillor Paul Pirri. If you catch your neighbour disposing of pool water, a sample of that pool water would then have to be taken, then have to be tested, and if it is tested and outside the allowance of chemicals, at that point the punitive damages within the bylaw would come into effect.

This was confirmed by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, who added that if a violation was determined, the Town would prosecute and head into the courts to impose a fine. At the time of the meeting, however, just how much that fine would be was unavailable.

It is my intent to be pragmatic in our application, Councillor Pirri continued before turning his attention to levelling the playing field. The second side of things is how we will be treating saltwater pools differently than regular chlorinated pools. We are going to be seeking to have saltwater pools discharged through the sewer system.

Is the expectation that people who have saltwater pools to be pumping the water back into their house so it would go down a bathtub drain? I have got a feeling there might be some significant levels of internal flooding if that is the case. The other impact on this is, if you do have a saltwater pool, the alternative is to go in and install a drain into the sewage system. I have no idea what the cost would be, but I think that cost is probably something that is impractical to impose.

The other problem is people who are on septic tanks who don't have access to a sewage system and [if they had saltwater pools, they] would have to get their water hauled away because you can't put it in the storm system. I am 100 per cent in favor of having an educational campaign because I believe that we should be encouraging appropriate environmental standards. What I am not in favour of is going down the road of a bylaw that is extremely difficult and impractical to enact.