

Health Committee BHWA 2006

The Health Committee of BHWA has been focusing on questions not only of water quality but tying that together with how it relates to human health. The Health Committee has been working tirelessly to gather information on this aspect of public health which seems to have been overlooked to some extent. Public health in relation to the Harbor is becoming an important topic in Baltimore through the city's shift from a traditionally industrial waterfront to an ever increasing residential and recreational center.

Most of the effort of the Health Committee this year has been in gathering information from many sources relating to the water quality of the Baltimore Harbor. The first step has been to simply determine what is being monitored and what agencies are responsible and accountable for examining the data collected. The goal being to see if adequate steps are being taken to account for public health and safety. We hope to identify where there are gaps in monitoring and enforcement in order to identify what needs to be done in order to correct the situation.

Monitoring is carried out by the City's Department of Public Works (DPW) and information is then submitted to the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) which is responsible for identifying the pollutants and establishing TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Loads) for each pollutant. A TMDL is the total amount of pollutant that a stream, lake, pond or other body of water can absorb and still meet applicable water quality standards.

Although bacterial TMDLs exist in tributaries to the Harbor there is no bacterial TMDL for the Harbor itself. Bacterial Pollution places humans at risk for infection through water contact. Since Public Health concerns itself with Bacterial Pollution, the Health Committee has been championing action now rather than delaying (as requested by MDE) until the year 2008. Another concern tied to bacteria and water quality is that for unexplained reasons, the Baltimore Harbor falls outside The Baltimore City Health Department jurisdiction and responsibility for closing beaches when high coliform counts are present in Baltimore Harbor is unclear. This is important because there is some swimming in the Baltimore Harbor at Ferry Bar Park as well as recently in the Inner Harbor on the man-made beach (Red Bull Flugtag Event).

One of the Goals of the BHWA is to bring attention to and discuss these issues in order to prevent infections from occurring.

In the coming year, BHWA is planning to partner with together the Health Department, DPW, MDE, as well as the Watershed Associations and the Baltimore Sewer Coalition, Parks and People Foundation, the Center for Watershed Protection and other interested parties to develop the Harris Creek Watershed 246 Project. This project will be similar to the current Watershed 263 Project in the west and southwest section of the City. This project has been very successful in bringing together many stakeholders, community groups, funding sources and research activities(UMBC).This will become a long term project that will create a great deal of interest from Canton to Patterson Park to Clifton Park and involve the Johns Hopkins' new Technology Park. It is easy to see how restoration of the Harris Creek Watershed in a holistic manner could enrich this area as well as be a major factor in reducing stormwater and trash from entering the Baltimore Harbor, reducing bacterial pollutants and improving the health of marine life as well as human life.