

Jones wants municipalities informed of sewage bypasses

The Ontario Water Resources Act already requires bypasses at sewage treatment plants to be reported, but impacted municipalities don't have to be informed.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones wants that changed.

Jones recently introduced legislation that would require the Ministry of Environment to publish within 24 hours cases of sewage bypasses into waterways.

Sewage bypasses occur when flow exceeds the capacity of the treatment plant, normally due to storms. This means that raw sewage is released into connected waterways.

Currently there is no requirement for public reporting when a bypass occurs, despite the potential risk to health of those who swim, paddle, boat or fish in affected waterways, Jones observed. This means that Ontarians are generally unaware of the occurrences of sewage bypasses and the presence of untreated sewage in their local waterways.

A recent example was the storms in early May in Toronto, she added. Lake Ontario Waterkeeper reported that E. coli levels ranged between 16 and 30 times the approved level for swimming in Lake Ontario due to storms.

She also stressed people have the right to know about such incidents.

Despite the Ministry being aware of sewage bypasses occurring, this information is not readily available to the public, she said.

What is missing from the legislation is that we don't have to publicly notify the municipalities, and the treatment facility operators do not publicly report that, Jones told the legislature, according to Hansard. I'm asking that the ministry, who already has the information, make it publicly available.