

# Gate malfunction source of poor water quality at Petrie Island

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Last Tuesday, Orléans city councillor Bob Monette, along with councillors Rainer Bloess (Ward 2 - Innes) and Rob Jellett (Ward 19 - Cumberland) held a press conference explaining the cause of 45 non swimming advisories at Petrie Island in the summer of 2006.

A tour of the Robert O. Pickford Environmental Centre (ROPEC) earlier this month initiated by Monette with community members of the Petrie Island Outdoor Club and the Friends of Petrie Island group, proved that in August of 2006, a gate left open for nearly two weeks after a record rainfall the previous month allowed 960,000 cubic metres of human waste into the Ottawa River instead of being properly redirected.

The gate is located close to 24 Sussex Drive.

"Petrie Island has been the subject of a lot of negative publicity," said Coun. Monette. "I was quite pleased with the tour at ROPEC. It is a facility that works so well and it's something to be proud of."

But questions still arise as to why it took nearly two years for the problem to be known. While there were no monitoring systems on the overflow gates, staff at ROPEC were unaware of the malfunction.

It was also stated that

city staff did conduct a routine monthly inspection of the overflow pipe system at the intersection of River Lane and Keefer Street, where the problem was discovered in the middle of August of 2006.

It was then reported to the Ministry of Environment days later, but who reported the issue and who knew about it remains to be seen.

The councillors and city staff said it was a communication shortfall, and that steps are being taken to ensure similar incidents don't happen again.

Coun. Jellett said although he is disappointed with the two year gap, at least the cause is finally known to Petrie Island's rough swimming season in 2006.

"We, as council, should know about these incidents right away," he said. "There are still some questions we as councillors

still need to ask. We need to find ways to ensure this doesn't happen again, and what protocols will be taken in the future."

Dixon Weir, the city's director of water and wastewater services, said that new steps are being taken to avoid similar mishaps such as implementing a real time control monitoring system.

"We have taken a great deal of learning from this," he added.

Coun. Monette commends city staff for coming forward with the information when they did. But he said, it's time to move on.

Moving on was echoed by Coun. Bloess.

"Petrie Island is a jewel in the east end," he said. "We understand what happened and there was a failure to communicate, but we need to move forward. We have to put this episode behind us."



Left to right: East end councillors Rob Jellett and Bob Monette during a press conference regarding the cause of Petrie Island's less than stellar swimming season in 2006.