




72nd Annual CIPHI Educational Conference

Hotel Saskatchewan
Radisson Plaza
Regina, Saskatchewan
June 26 - 28, 2006

Go to <http://www.ciphi-sk.ca/conference.htm> for more information.



Downtown Vancouver from High — Phi Phan

Message from the President

Viewing the current status of the field in Alberta, I can't help but feel that, collectively, we are moving in the right direction. We're currently on track to have a record year for regular and student memberships, yet the membership is only a part of it. Work continues to develop a system of continuing education that is maintainable over the long-term and in that regard, meetings are never-ending. Now the work must evolve from the basic framework that has been formed. We can only look ahead as it's the future that we are building!

And if you're still unsure of the process that CIPHI has undertaken with regards to this project, please contact me or visit the National website and check under "Core Competencies."

Looking inwards, the Alberta Branch has never been in such a comfortable position. Support from members and employers is high, the Branch is financially stable and the Executive that you have chosen are eager and willing to advance the Branch and the profession.

However, we cannot rest upon our laurels, lest our work and our profession stagnate. When the news article

concerning "Perogy Police" was published, we could have easily sat back and waited for the negativity to wash over. However, no one will advocate for us as much as we will. So I challenge all members to work to highlight the positive work that we as Environ-

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Editorial Comment

One word, which continues to grow in popularity in our society today, is the word "organic." With respect to "organic foods", the perception is that these products are not only much "healthier" for us, but many believe "safer" as well.

"Organic" or "natural" food choices, seem to be offered almost everywhere now, and at a premium price as well. Although we would all agree that chemicals, either added to the foods or used as pesticides, are of great public concern, we must question whether "organic" products are indeed safer?

An article written in Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition claimed the jury is still out on this one. There is little scientific substantiation but plenty of anecdotal evidence. Could the number of outbreaks actually "increase", due to organically grown produce? We've all seen several, well documented, produce related outbreaks, and as public health professionals, we may need to focus more attention on produce as a source of illness. Produce historically, has been considered a fairly low risk food, but this is no longer the case, with problems arising from both, pre and post harvesting of produce. Since Canada doesn't grow fruits and vegetables year round,



(except for a few greenhouses), we must rely on other warmer countries for imports, and these country's standards may not be as high as our own.

Many restaurant chains will no longer purchase produce from countries that have a track record of distributing contaminated produce. Education of producers, workers, and the public, is key in maintaining a safe food supply.

Another "organic" or "natural" food issue is the increasing demand from consumers for unpasteurized milk, yet we all know that one of the "greatest" accomplishments of public health, has been pasteurization.

Advocates of raw milk, claim that the pasteurization process eliminates key nutrients and enzymes. Others state that the claims are unfounded. In reading a few articles from the advocates and opposition to raw milk, it seems that the message is not hitting home. One article stated that they felt there was a greater chance of dying in a car accident, than there was of getting sick from drinking raw milk.

Are the "perceived" health benefits really worth the "risk"? ☐

- Adam Stokowski, Editor

Editorial Policy

In the pursuit of the Association's objectives, the Editor and the Newsletter Committee is authorized to publish this Newsletter on a periodic basis, as deemed appropriate. The objectives of the Association are:

- The development and advancement of environmental health, and
- To support the advancement of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors.

The Association Executive Board has the authority to provide general direction respecting the content of the Newsletter and, in consultation with the Editor, to set policies regarding administrative matters of each issue.

The Editor shall have the general authority to select material for publication in the Newsletter provided all material meets the criteria of being within the objectives of the Association.

Views, comments or positions within the contents of the Newsletter are those of the Editor, Editorial Staff and/or the author, respectively, and does not necessarily reflect those of the Association Executive or its' membership.



Stupid rules or modern food standards?

Are the food police aiming to shut down fundraisers and church dinners?

Apparently not in Alberta, where last week, after numerous complaints, the provincial cabinet approved new regulations that would see health inspectors relax requirements on community organized food events.

Effective April 1, event organizers no longer need a health permit or formal food-handling education. Sean Beardow, Alberta Health spokesman, stated health authorities didn't want to unduly restrict community organized food events, and marveled, "Do we need the same food preparation training at a restaurant that serves 300 tables a night versus someone who is doing a pancake breakfast?"

A delicate question and one that even I, a self-professed food safety geek, had to go back to reading my novel, Paulo Coelho's, *The Alchemist*, to mull over.

Only then did I realize why I was having problems devising a diplomatic answer to Beardow's question; because -- in the words of Coelho -- "like everyone else, I see the world in terms of what I would like to see happen, not what actually does."

I would like for these groups not to have to take on the extra burdens related to food safety; I would like to believe that outbreaks of foodborne illness do not occur when people are volunteering their time to raise funds for community or charitable causes. But nasty bugs don't distinguish between commercial and charitable

food operations.

On September 24, 2005, at least 50 people, including several members of the volunteer organization who hosted the event, fell ill after eating a barbecue chicken dinner in rural Nova Scotia. The outbreak investigation revealed that well-intentioned organizers had erred when preparing the potato salad. Sloppy food handling and a lack of timely refrigeration at a safe temperature provided the ideal conditions for *Staphylococcus aureus* intoxication. Community volunteers at the event were so shaken up that they requested therapeutic debriefing and counseling.



Unfortunately this outbreak is not unique.

In September 2004, near Buffalo, New York, 28 confirmed cases of *Salmonella* infection were reported to the Erie County Department of Health following an annual community roast-beef dinner. Outbreak investigators found that volunteers were not trained in foodservice and "didn't quite understand the importance of maintaining a hot or cold temperature."

Turns out they really did not under-

stand at all.

The beef was roasted on spits and the juices, collecting in a 5-gallon bucket at room temperature over the course of the day, was poured over the surface of ready-to-eat beef sandwiches. Scrumptious. Except that the sandwiches were being drenched with both flavorful juices and *Salmonella* bacteria that had multiplied throughout the day at room temperature. Interviews with attendees indicated that approximately 1,500 of the 3,000 who attended the event were ill.

These outbreaks are unique in that enough people actually reported that they were sick. Most cases of foodborne illness goes unreported and as a result, many people have no idea how common an occurrence it is. Some one-in-four North Americans get sick from the food and water they consume each and every year.

Following the outbreak in N.S., freelance writer, Kathleen Winter, wrote to the *Telegram* (St. John's, Newfoundland) that she knew someone who wouldn't eat anything at a potluck except the dish she brought herself. Winter was quoted as saying, "she's not me, but I think she's less insane the older I get."

I agree.

Potluck dinners, where food is prepared behind the closed doors of private homes and church kitchens, can be hazardous. Unlike a restaurant kitchen, there's little control over

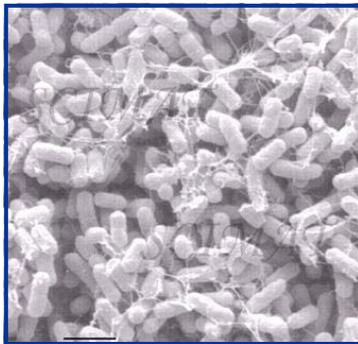
(Continued on page 4)

The Great Published Masses

Congratulations to the Alberta Branch members below, who authored/co-authored articles that appeared in scientific journals in 2005. (Names of members are **bolded**.)

- ▶ An outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 hemorrhagic colitis associated with unpasteurized gouda cheese. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 2005;96:182-4.

◆ **Lance Honish**, G Predy, **Nyall Hislop**, L Chui, K Kowalewska-Grochowska, L Trottier, C Kreplin, **Ingrid Zazulak**.



- ▶ Restaurant foodhandler-associated outbreak of Salmonella Heidelberg gastroenteritis identified by calls to a local telehealth service, Edmonton, Alberta, 2004. *Canada Communicable Disease Report* 2005;31:105-10.

◆ **Lance Honish**, **Nyall Hislop**, **Ingrid Zazulak**, L Chui L, G Tyrrell.

- ▶ Gastrointestinal illness outbreak of Salmonella Enteritidis in a private long term care facility in Alberta, in May 2004. *Environmental Health Review*

2005;49:56-59.

◆ **Zaheen Nanji**, N Singh.

- ▶ Outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 infection in Calgary Health Region at a food facility, April to May 2005. *Environmental Health Review* 2005;49:92-5.

◆ **Jennifer Jacobsen**.

- ▶ Clinical, microbiological and epidemiological findings of an outbreak of Mycobacterium abscessus hand-and-foot disease. *Diagnostic Microbiology and Infectious Disease* 2005;53:39-45.

◆ MT Dytoc, **Lance Honish**, C Shandro, PT Ting, L Chui, L Fiorillo, J Robinson, A Fanning, G Predy, RP Rennie.

- ▶ Locally acquired histoplasmosis cluster, Alberta, 2003. *Canada Communicable Disease Report* 2005;31:255-8.

◆ H Anderson, G Taylor, EA Fanning, **Lance Honish**, M Johnson, J Jaipaul, **Steven Probert**, C Tovstiuik, G Tyrrell, R Rennie, C Sand.

Did we miss your 2005 publication? Have you published something in 2006? Let us know by emailing the Editor at astokowski@dthr.ab.ca! ☐

- Adam Stokowski, Editor



Stupid rules or modern food standards?
(Continued from page 3)

how the food was prepared, stored handled or transported.

In Ontario, churches, service clubs and fraternal organizations that prepare and serve meals for special events (or host bake sales) for their members and personally invited guests are exempt from the Food Premises Regulations, as authorized by the Health Act. However, if the event is publicly advertised, rules apply.

When it comes to preventing food-borne illness, local health departments have a responsibility to check out public food events and, while each department may have their own interpretation of the regulations, they do not seem to be out to police and shut down community food events. Instead they appear unified in ensuring that food handlers have the best available information to keep food safe, while providing the community with an enjoyable meal.

As Diana Alegria, Hospitality Committee, Grace Church, Cobourg Ontario, wrote in a letter to the editor of her local newspaper, "It is time, dear people, for people in churches (any organization) who are responsible for organizing functions in which food is served to begin to update and move forward to meet modern standards."

Amen. ☐

- Brae Surgeoner

*Brae Surgeoner is a graduate student with the Food Safety Network at the University of Guelph. Commentary appeared in FSNET February 15, 2006. Reprinted with permission

Message from the President continued...
(Continued from page 1)

mental Public Health Professionals do on a daily basis and to debunk the myths and misconceptions that still float around. We are no longer doing technician jobs and if we believe that we are professional, then let's prove it to everyone else.

I am pleased to see that David Thompson Health will play host to this year's Annual Fall Workshop. With a determined and spirited bunch of volunteers, I am sure that the organizing committee will produce an excellent event! For those wanting to assist and/or volunteer, I would ask you to contact either Garth Gosselin

(ggosselin@dthr.ab.ca) or Diane Luka (dluka@dthr.ab.ca).

Finally, I would like to remind members of some important dates for the upcoming National Annual General Meeting to be held in conjunction with the 72nd Annual Education Conference in Regina, Saskatchewan:

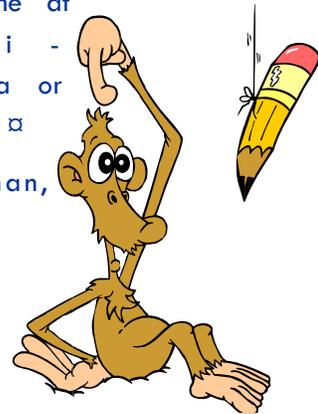
- **Deadline: March 27 (90 days before AGM):**
 - ▶ If you're interested in becoming the National President, you must complete a 'Notice of Intent' form with endorsement of the Alberta Branch
 - ▶ If you wish to make a Notice of Motion (changes to the

Bylaws or Constitution)

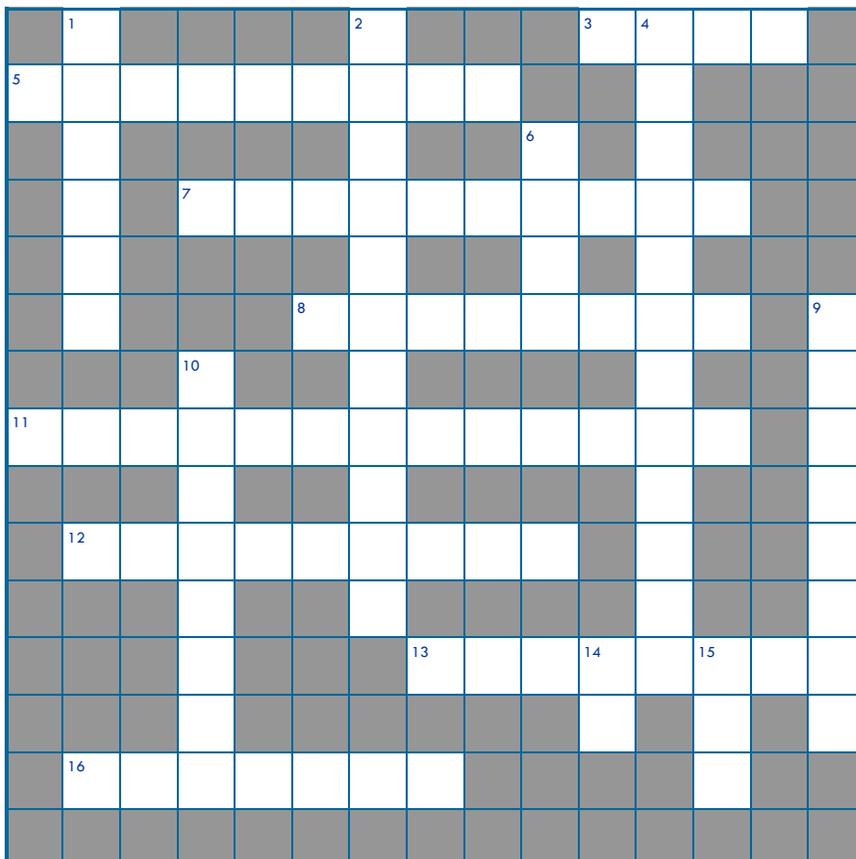
- ▶ If you wish to make a Resolution of any variety.
- **Deadline: April 27 (60 days)**
 - ▶ Nominations for National Awards

As always, if anyone should have questions, comments or concerns with regards to continuing professional competencies, CIPHI National, the Branch or anything else, feel free to drop me a line at president@ciphi.ab.ca or (780)907-8698. ☺

— Phi Phan,
President



PHI Puzzlemania

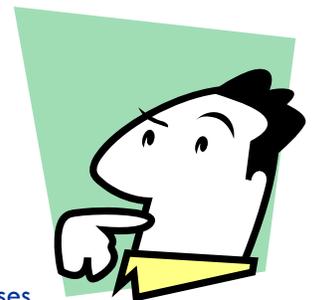


Across

3. Lyme Disease
5. C. botulinum
7. Associated with mice
8. World-wide outbreak
11. Swimmers' Itch
12. Common outbreak
13. Spread by mosquitoes
16. Sarcoptic itch

Down

1. Animal Bite
2. Parrot Fever
4. Vaccination
6. Pediculosis
9. Animal-borne diseases
10. Montezuma's Revenge
14. Chronic cough
15. Hospital infection control



By Scott Budgett (David Thompson Health Region)

Answers on page 9

CN Derailment at Lake Wabamun—Lessons Learned

For many of us August 3, 2005 began as a warm, sunny, summer day filled with the promise that only the “dog days of summer” can hold. Everywhere, that is, except at Lake Wabamun where the day began with a “bang” in the most literal sense imaginable.

At approximately 5:30 am, 43 cars of a westbound CN freight train derailed at the heart of the Whitewood Sands subdivision located on Lake Wabamun. Local emergency response plans were immediately put into action, which included immediate evacuation of all Whitewood Sands residents.



As we now know, the derailed CN rail cars contained more than 700,000 L of Bunker C oil, approximately 80,000 L of pole treating oil (PTO), and an unknown quantity of canola meal. There were actually two separate crash sites, the hydrocarbon crash site and the canola meal crash site.

CN informed Capital Health more than 7 hours after the initial derailment occurred. By that time, Whitewood Sands residents had been evacuated and families living north

of the tracks in Whitewood Sands were allowed to return to their homes later that same morning. The Village of Wabamun’s source water intake from the Lake was shut off and the Village had to quickly start looking for an alternate supply of drinking water. And finally, an undetermined quantity of Bunker C oil and other contaminants began flowing from the crash site towards and into the Lake, across a number of residential lake-front lots immediately adjacent to the crash site.

Water currents and the prevailing winds eventually spread the Bunker C oil along many of the northeastern and southeastern parts of the lake. This ultimately impacted private individuals, Lake Wabamun communities including the Paul First Nation, recreational camps, commercial users, with additional impacts on local wildlife as well.



Transalta, a major power generator in the province (and located on Lake Wabamun) was forced to shut down for many weeks, and took action to protect their second power plant on the opposite side of the lake. Had the second power plant shut down,

there could have been a significant ripple effect felt across the provincial power grid.

The initial Capital Health response was to send 2 public health investigators to the crash site upon notification from CN. Despite the length of time it took to arrive at the site (two to three hours including driving to the site, negotiating past the CN police roadblock, finding the actual crash site and CN emergency operations trailer and being escorted by CN police across to the actual crash site) it took less than 5 minutes to relay the needed information to the Medical Officer of Health’s office to start the process to issue the first public health advisory.

That advisory included no swimming, boating, fishing, or lake water use for the entire lake. A second advisory was issued 5 days later when Capital Health was informed of the PTO spill at the train derailment site. The advisory was issued two hours after notice was given of the additional spill. At the time of the original crash there was no mention made of this second, more hazardous chemical release.

There were many lessons learned during that tumultuous and chaotic first afternoon (and the subsequent weeks and months).

Capital Health’s response involved multi-disciplinary teams to deal with on-going concerns associated with emergency response, public health investigation, risk and exposure as-

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CN Derailment at Lake Wabamun—Lessons Learned
(Continued from page 6)

assessment, communication and finally, administrative matters. Teams were created to conduct water and air sampling, deal with residents' concerns at the crash site and other communities around the Lake, attend regulatory and public meetings, evaluate the mountains of information generated from the collective sampling efforts. Meanwhile other EHO's ensured that all of the other environmental public health needs throughout the rest of Capital Health were being still being met.

As the days after the crash progressed, Environmental Public Health began the process of moving from the acute emergency and contaminant release phase of the initial crash event towards evaluating the chronic exposure potential from contaminants still remaining in and around the Lake and at the crash site.

Bunker C oil is an environmentally persistent hydrocarbon. Total recovery of the spilled contaminant did not occur. Inland lakes, unlike oceans or rivers, represent a closed environmental system with a comparatively low dilution factor. PTO is still being extracted from the railbed at White-wood Sands and will continue for the next two years.

The questions remaining are:

- Who was affected;
- Who is still affected;
- Who may become affected; and

- Finally, what information will be needed to ensure that the public's health remains protected from all sequelae of this emergency incident?

Public health advisories in effect for this Lake, as well for a small number of White-wood Sands residents whose ground-water wells may still become impacted by remaining contaminants.

The first lesson learned was that Environmental Public Health has a clear and strong mandate for public health protection. It can act very quickly and effectively, even when it becomes the last agency to be notified with little or no information available or forthcoming during the first hours of the emergency.

Second lesson: in the absence of complete scientific data needed to do a rigorous public health risk assessment, use your senses

of sight, smell, and sound at the emergency scene to gather and evaluate crucial information.

That information, when combined with you and your colleagues' collective public health experience and knowledge allows the initial public health emergency site risk assessment to be quickly communicated to the MOH's office, making certain that all proper precautions can be taken to ensure

the public's health remains protected. Then begin planning the processes that will be needed to collect all information required to evaluate acute and chronic health impacts from the emergency.

Testing (be it air, water, soil, vegetation, wildlife, or people) will continue for as often and as long as needed, and will serve to reaffirm those first critical observations. The analytical parameters and sampling media may change as the investigation progresses and more information becomes available. Bunker C and pole treating oil are complex mixtures of PAH's, hydrocarbons, and metals.

Not all detected constituents in these complex hydrocarbon mixtures have defined human exposure limits. In fact more than 60% of detectable Bunker C PAHs have no reference health guideline values for human or aquatic life exposure.

Third lesson: make sure that you have all of the appropriate personal protective equipment with you at all times and ensure you know how to use it properly. Train derailment sites require equipment such as steel-toed boots, reflective safety vests, hardhats, safety glasses, photo identification, and possibly respirators. Don't let a public health investigation be sidetracked simply because you weren't properly

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“Total recovery of the spilled contaminant did not occur.”



CN Derailment at Lake Wabamun—Lessons Learned

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equipped to meet all crash site workplace safety regulations or that by not being properly equipped, it became dangerous for you to enter that site.

Effective means of communicating is



essential. All needed information must be relayed back to your manager and the MOH's office as soon as possible using any means possible including cell phone, landline (if available) or two-way radio. The August 3/05 Wabamun CN investigation was directly affected by the local telecommunications carrier strike; even the

CN emergency center had difficulties to communicate to the outside world because of this.

Fourth lesson: maintain a sense of perspective and more importantly, a sense of humor. Remember why you are

there and what your role truly is. You're working in a very high stress, volatile, and sometimes explosive environment. You may be suddenly working with agencies or individuals representing agencies that are unaware of you and the RHA or the need for public health's involvement.

There may not be a clear understanding, but there will be definite opinions expressed by others about how the RHA, the local public health regulatory agency, actually fits into the bigger picture of the emergency situation. Those opinions may conflict with the RHA's. Work through those conflicts, but ensure that the public's health remains protected.

Carol Alloway and I spent many hours together as a result of respond-

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Upcoming Events

Another year has passed and we can now focus on the new challenges that 2006 may provide. As public health professionals we have to continually stay current on new and emerging issues facing our profession and the public.

Most recently, Alberta Health and Wellness put on a well attended and informative zoonotic disease workshop. The workshop had representation from various animal and human health agencies. Topics included influenza, transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), and zoonoses.

With influenza and TSE's a hot topic as of late, this was a welcomed

workshop by everyone.

More upcoming conferences include :

- International Association of Food Protection being held August 13-16 in Calgary. This is the world's leading food safety conference with presentations and activities scheduled. Visit www.foodprotection.org/meetingEducation/2006ammmain.asp for more information.
- Water in the City Conference September 17 – 20 in Victoria, BC. The intent of the workshop is to take a visionary look at water issues facing communities and to

explore innovative approaches and practical policy alternatives necessary to solving these issues. More information is available at www.waterinthecityvictoria.ca.

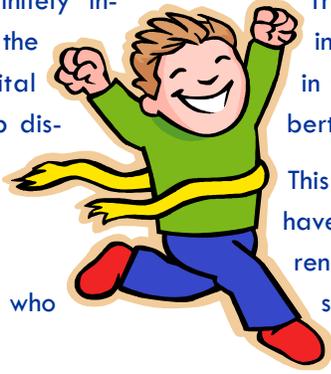
- This year's fall educational workshop will be held in Red Deer, AB. The theme has yet to be determined, but planning has already commenced. If you are interested in participating in the planning committee or as a sponsor please direct your e-mail to either Garth Gosselin (ggosselin@dthr.ab.ca) or Diane Luka (dluka@dthr.ab.ca).

- Adam Stokowski, Editor

Membership Report

2005 ended as one of our best years for membership. Membership in the Alberta Branch is definitely increasing especially in the Calgary and Capital zones. The membership distribution as of Dec. 12, 2005 is outlined in the table below.

Thank you to all those who



renewed their membership before Dec. 31, 2005. The winner of the free registration to the NEC in Regina will be announced in the next edition of the Alberta Branch News.

This is just a reminder that you have until March 31, 2006 to renew your membership and still be considered a mem-

ber in good standing.

The last day to purchase your raffle tickets for a free membership in CIPHI is Feb. 28, 2006. If you have not already purchased your tickets, contact your zone councilor. The draw for will take place at the Spring General Meeting. ☐

- Tricia Herridge, Membership Chair

	Life	Regular	Retired	Student	Total
Arctic	0	10	0	0	10
Calgary	0	42	1	1	44
Capital	0	60	1	15	76
Central	1	19	0	1	21
Northern	0	27	0	0	27
Southern	1	10	1	2	14
Total	2	168	3	19	192

Calgary's Mini-Baby Boom

On behalf of the Alberta Branch, I would like to congratulate Sarah Nunn and her husband Steve on their recent additions to their family. Up until November, Sarah had been in the Vice-President position for the Branch.

Welcome babies Andrew, Heather and Matthew to the Alberta Branch... or at least welcome to the world! ☐

- Phi Phan, President



Answers to Puzzle

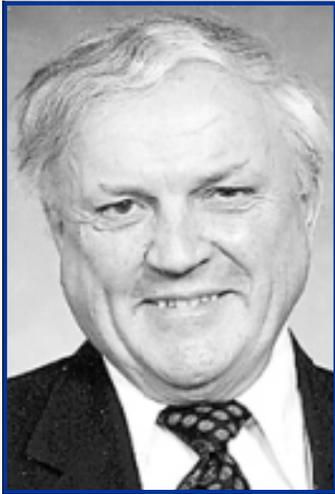
Across

3. Tick
5. Paralysis
7. Hantavirus
8. Pandemic
11. Schistosomiasis
12. Norovirus
13. West Nile
16. Scabies

Down

1. Rabies
2. Psittacosis
4. Vaccination
6. Lice
9. Zoonoses
10. Diarrhea
14. TB
15. IPC

In Memoriam



On January 8, 2006, William Kent of Edmonton passed away at the age of 88. He is remembered by sister, Evelyn; brother, Paul (Wanell); sons, Terry and Barry (Merja);

granddaughter, Miranda (Terry) and grandson, Chris (Amy); great-grandchildren, Claire and Henry Newton and Adiya Kent; and special friend, Aurora.

William was predeceased by his loving wife, Elizabeth; brothers and sisters, Nick, John, Mike, Wilfred, Jennie, Steve, and Harry. He served his country as a veteran of WW II followed by a lengthy career with the City becoming Edmonton's Chief Health Inspector.

Well respected and admired, many of the long-time members of Capital Health (previously the Edmonton Board of Health) had the fortune to

have Mr. Kent as their supervisor and /or manager.

A note of condolence was sent on behalf of the Alberta Branch in memory of Mr. Kent. It is important that we always acknowledge the work of our predecessors, because it is through their work and determination that we find ourselves in such a dynamic and well-developed environmental public health system today.

☩
- Phi Phan, President



✧ NOTICE ✧

Annual General Meeting

Date

April 22, 2006

Time

10:00am

Location

Holiday Inn - The Palace
4235 Gateway Blvd. N
Edmonton, AB

Please submit all agenda items to Merry Turtiak (secretary@ciphi.ab.ca) or any Executive member prior to April 15, 2006.

CN Derailment at Lake Wabamun—Lessons Learned

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ing to this emergency, especially during the early days of the derailment. There were so many new sights, sounds, smells, and people at the derailment site, which formed part of our collective memories.

Everyone wearing a safety vest, hardhat, safety glasses and boots suddenly started to look the same. One of my personal favourite memories happened as Carol and I were walking back to her van after the late afternoon CN debriefing on August 3/05, when the CN public relations executive ran after us calling out “public health girls, public health girls!” Carol and I were certainly a small minority of women in an overwhelming majority of men at this emergency site. This individual really wanted a connection to Capital Health’s public relations branch rather than our main focus, the public health issues created by the derailment. But what a treat! A total stranger just validated the age that my mind thinks I might still sometimes be, just by saying a few simple words. It still counts, even if that was-

n’t the original purpose of the conversation!

Next lesson: the people that become directly or indirectly affected by the emergency event are really frightened and in some cases, very angry. Sometimes it seems that their anger is directed towards you, but it isn’t. They will have questions and concerns that you may not have the answers to, but that need to be addressed. There will be an overwhelming personal and community need for some sense of certainty and security. More often than not, the community will look to the local health agency to provide some measure of reassurance. There will be lots of rumors and misinformation circulating; those need to be addressed. Facts must be communicated quickly and firmly. This will need to involve the RHA communications and media relations staff, who will be preparing the news releases



and/or press releases for the RHA. Facts appear to travel much slower than fiction. That is also part, and parcel, of public health protection.

The last, and most important, lesson learned was that the relationships built with other regulatory agencies and the municipalities involved in a disaster of this magnitude happened as a result of hard work, individual dedication, frank and sometimes lively discussions, good communication, and an ability to work together towards the common purpose. This collaboration ultimately resulted in increased mutual respect and understanding of the other agencies positions and knowledge. Those relationships need to be fostered and developed further in non-emergency times. After all, the next emergency is only waiting around the corner. We will all be thrown together again, by another emergency, or another incident. Have we learned anything from our past experiences? ☐

— Karen Emde, Senior Advisor (Capital Health)



Alberta Branch News

The Alberta Branch News is published quarterly by the Communications Committee of the Alberta Branch to provide current information on the many activities of the Alberta Branch. The newsletter is distributed to members and friends of the Alberta Branch.

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Is that right?

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - San Francisco, a leader in urban recycling, is preparing to enlist its canine population for a first in the United States: converting dog poop into energy.

Norcal Waste Systems Inc., the city's garbage company, plans to test collection carts and biodegradable bags in a city-center park popular with dog walkers.

A city study found that almost 4 percent of all the garbage picked up at San Francisco homes was from animal waste destined for the city's landfill, Norcal Waste spokesman Robert Reid said. San Francisco has an estimated 120,000 dogs.

"The city asked us to start thinking about a pilot program to recycle the dog poop in order to cut back adding more waste in landfills," Reid said.



Dog feces could be scooped into a methane digester, a device that uses bugs and microorganisms to gobble up the material and emit methane, which would be trapped and burned to power a turbine to make electricity or to heat homes.

Dogs and cats in the United States produce about 10 million tonnes of waste a year, Will Brinton, an environmental scientist and owner-director of Woods End Laboratories in Maine, said.

"As much as we love them, our pets leave a lot of manure behind them in yards and on the street and that can be a major source of contamination of groundwater," Brinton said.

European cities such as Zurich, Frankfurt, Munich and Vienna are operating biomass programs to turn waste into gas, he said.

San Francisco runs an aggressive program to recycle bottles, cans, paper and other trash and now diverts two-thirds of its garbage away from landfills.

The city's goal is a 75 percent diversion by 2010 and zero new waste in landfills by 2020. □