

Water safety warnings Christmas Day

Mild December weather and unusual precipitation prompted a Watershed Conditions Statement from the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) on Christmas Day. The statement released at 9am on December 25th was issued to all municipalities, school boards, police, and local conservation authorities. The advisory stated that rain received in the previous 48 hours had caused elevated flows in all area watercourses.

According to Stephanie Durocher, NVCA Flood Warning Coordinator, a Watershed Conditions Statement is "a general notice of weather conditions that could pose a risk to personal safety or which have the potential to lead to flooding. A Water Safety message indicates that high flows, unsafe banks, melting ice or other factors could be dangerous for recreational users such as anglers, canoeists, hikers, children, and pets. Flooding is not expected."

The NVCA watershed had received rainfall of up to 40 mm over two days, causing increased stream flows. Although no major flooding was anticipated, the NVCA cautioned that flows on all area water courses would remain high in the days that followed and suggested vigilance, especially for parents of young children.

The NVCA watershed covers nearly 3,700 sq. km, with authority in 18 municipalities. Their jurisdiction includes the Boyne River, the Mad, the Pine, Willow Creek and Innisfil Creek. All these rivers ultimately drain into the Nottawasaga River. NVCA also has control over the Pretty River and the Bateaux River which drain directly into Georgian Bay.

Concerns for safety prompted the warning to the public, advising them to stay away from all area water bodies. Authorities warned that slippery banks and fast flowing watercourses would result in dangerous conditions and the safety warning would remain in effect until Monday, December 29th.

In a follow up with the Flood Warning Coordinator on December 28th, Stephanie Durocher, the Free Press received an update which stated that reports indicated "the watershed received up to 50 mm over three days in some areas." Durocher noted, "Most streams were at their highest on Christmas day, and water levels have been receding since then." She assured the public that the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority would continue to monitor conditions and the statement was to stay in effect until the 29th. "I expect that we will return to normal conditions after that," she said.

On January 2nd, the NVCA advised that snow expected the next day could change to rain, causing snowmelt and elevated flows in all area watercourses with a low potential for flooding. The area had received significant snow, and an incoming weather system, that was expected to reach the watershed on January 3rd and change to rainfall of 10 to 30 mm, was forecast to cause increased stream flows.

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority will continue issue additional messages as conditions warrant. For additional information, call 705-424-1479 and select option "1" for the flood information line or check the NVCA website at: www.nvca.on.ca

By Marni Walsh