

Town warns of stormwater pond dangers

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With people looking for outdoor activities to do over the winter months, as a way of getting out of their homes, the Town of Shelburne's Public Works Department is reminding residents that stormwater ponds are not for recreational use.

Public Works, through numerous notifications released on social media and the Town's website, has been stressing the unsafe nature of the stormwater ponds; urging residents to use extreme caution when near them.

"The ponds may look safe and appeal to skaters and for other recreational activities, but they are unsafe," reads a notification from Public Works.

Shelburne has around 12 stormwater management ponds located throughout the town that store and treat water. The man-made ponds, which are typically seen in residential areas, are designed to prevent flooding, erosion and improve the quality of water before being released back into the nearest stream or river.

Jim Moss, director of Shelburne's public works, says that due to the nature of the ponds, waters levels can fluctuate drastically, both rising and falling quickly, which can hinder the formation of reliable, safe ice.

While some older stormwater management ponds in the community have been fenced off from residents, newer ones have been created to be part of the environment, including trails that make it more of a recreational area.

Moss says unfortunately some take it too far and see it as a recreation centre for outdoor activities.

"They're not meant for recreational use, whether it be kayaking in the summer or ice skating in the winter," says Moss. "They're there as a stormwater retention pond."

The Town's caution against the dangers of stormwater ponds comes after an 11-year-old boy from Milton died after falling through the ice of a storm management pond back in December.

Shelburne Fire Chief Ralph Snyder says that the Shelburne Fire Department is strictly shore based and won't go into the water for rescues.

"It's a very complex training to be able to do ice water rescue," said Snyder. "We are shore based only so we will throw you a lifesaver and hopefully you can grab it and we can pull you to shore."

"Self-rescue on ice that is breaking up is extremely hard to do because the ice just keeps breaking in front of you, and you keep falling in."

Despite the notifications for safety Moss says that they've received a number of requests from residents asking permission to use the pond that they've had to deny.

"We've have two stormwater management ponds that have been actively cleaned or shoveled off, which looks like they're being used for skating areas," said Moss.

The Town at this time is working on adding two more outdoor rinks to compensate for those looking to do outdoor activities.