

# The BEACON

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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FREE



**RIVER CRITTERS:** Most kids enjoy delving into the wonderful world of bugs, and Grade 2 students at Riverview Public School near Sombra recently had the opportunity to do just that. The *Riverbottom Critters* program, presented by the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRC), educates students about ways to keep waterways healthy. It also shows them live specimens of the tiny creatures that live on the river bottom. Among the specimens exhibited were tiny water fleas, mayfly and midge larvae, water mites, bloodworms and zebra mussels. Engrossed in their exploration of a specimen dish are Ashley Nantais, left, Bradley Haggerty, and Shelby Churcher. The Riverbottom Critters program is one of several environmental education programs the SCRC takes into local schools each year. Photo by Bonni Stevenson

## Local industries closely scrutinized by government team

By Bonni Stevenson

A team of environmental investigators is currently looking closely at Sarnia area industries.

Ontario's environmental SWAT team of 30 inspectors was dispatched to the area by Environment Minister Leona Dombrowsky after Imperial Oil's Sarnia facility spilled 150,000 litres of solvents into the St. Clair River on Feb. 1. Since then, another incident was reported on Feb. 16, and low levels of the hydrocarbons pentane, butane and t-methyl butane were found in some samples of river water. Testing conducted by the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) at water intakes on Walpole Island and at Wallaceburg also found traces of ethylene glycol, better known as radiator fluid, in one of eight samples.

St. Clair Township Mayor Joe Dedecker believes the presence of the SWAT team is a very positive development for the area and its industries. "I'm happy the team is here. It's a good way to clear the air," he said. "I know industries are working very hard to follow regulations. There might be some changes made but I think they're (industries) doing everything they're supposed to do and I'll be surprised if they (SWAT team) find any problems."

Environmental advocates in the downriver area are also pleased the SWAT team is conducting such an intensive investigation. St. Clair Township Councillor Darrell Randell, who is also a habitat specialist with Ducks Unlimited, says the spills, three in the past six months, have been causing tremendous problems for communities downstream from the Chemical Valley. "We can't go on with the downriver communities on alert all the time," he said. "There are always improvements they (industries) can make."

The SWAT team's director, John Stager, estimates it will take several months to establish whether or not industries are complying with environmental laws. Michael Benedict, the SWAT team's unit supervisor, explained team members have been doing preliminary research by acquainting themselves with local industry-related information gathered by the district MOE office in Sarnia. They must also prepare for their on-site visits by taking the mandatory health and safety training required by each industry.

Benedict says the team wants to be well-prepared before beginning any inspection. "We're taking site-specific training," he said. "If the site is geographically large, it takes longer."

Benedict also notes the team is drawing on the expertise of local MOE inspectors because each inspection must be carefully laid out before going on-site. "Before we visit these sites we get as much information as we can...to prepare inspection plans," he said. "Some of these plants are very big and complex. Every time we think we're prepared we unearth more information."

Although no definite timetable was set, Benedict expected to have the team on-site by the end of February. The team was also called into service to help identify the mystery spill of Feb. 16. "We helped them by taking samples and getting them to the lab," said Benedict.

The recent spills have not only drawn the attention of the provincial government, they have adversely affected the river's environmental status with BFAC (Binational Public Advisory Council). This group looks after the St. Clair River's remedial action plan. It has been working to restore the health of the river so it is no longer looked upon as an "area of concern". This classification was

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## Ethanol project planned for Suncor

A huge investment of federal funding will likely bring Canada's largest ethanol plant to Lambton County.

Suncor Energy Products Inc. is among the first six companies to receive funding under the first round of the Government of Canada's \$100-million Ethanol Expansion Program. This phase of the program totals \$78 million in federal contributions.

Ottawa is contributing \$22 million to the \$120 million local project. It is estimated the facility could create 35 to 40 permanent jobs, as well as 250 construction jobs. And because

the plant will produce fuel-grade ethanol from grains such as corn, the area's farming community is expected to receive a positive boost as well.

Suncor recently purchased 164 acres of land north of Churchill Road between Tashmo Road and Vidal Street to accommodate the new facility. But the project is being questioned by the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Concerns have been raised over the emissions and odors that may result from ethanol production.

In full operation, the plant would annually produce up to

208 million litres of ethanol fuel. Preliminary engineering costing \$3 million has already been done on the facility, and it is hoped the plant will be in operation by mid-2006.

Suncor, through its Sunoco gas stations, currently sells ethanol-blend gasolines in Ontario. It is the only major gasoline company to do so. Ethanol is a cleaner-burning fuel and, when blended with gasoline, it has been shown to significantly reduce the emission of greenhouse gas from vehicles that use it. All gasoline vehicles produced since 1979 can use up to 10 per cent ethanol blends.