Small town wants pulp mill waste removed

Erin PERKINS *The Canadian Press*

KRESTOVA — Residents of the Slocan Valley town of Krestova want pulp mill waste that's been trucked onto three properties to be removed over fears their ground water could be contaminated.

The Zellstoff Celgar pulp mill in neighbouring Castlegar is offering the so-called bio solids, which are created from wood waste, for free as a type of fertilizer that would otherwise be burned.

"I feel we're just being used as a dump site," said Nick Kootnikoff, whose well supplies water for eight properties and is within the 30-metre legal limit of an acreage containing the waste.

"If I knew what was in there I'd feel more comfortable, but from what I've heard it has sewage sludge in it," he said. "I'm uncomfortable with sludge that has human waste in it."

"We want it removed," said Alan Anton, who lives a few houses down from one property where the waste has gone.

"There is a community hall and day care centre downhill of this field. If our water got contaminated that is our only water source and we're hooped for 25 years."

Anton said there are three properties containing bio solids in the community of 150 people that was settled by Doukhobors and is about 20 kilometres from Nelson.

Jim McLaren, a retired Celgar employee who now arranges the distribution of bio solids for the company, said the material contains mainly wood fibres, mixed with 40 per cent surplus bacteria, which aid in breaking down the wood fibres, and 10 per cent lime, grit, gravel and waste water.

McLaren said waste water from the sewage treatment plant is deposited on piles of bio solids and it's so safe that it's also dumped in the Columbia River.

He said Celgar delivers the fertilizer-like bio solids to property owners after a lengthy application process with the Environment Ministry.

"We don't think there is a biological risk to this material," said McLaren, who doesn't recommend people use the bio solids on land where food is grown.

He said 33 other properties in the Kootenay area contain the bio waste and that 27 applications for the material are pending with the Environment Ministry.

Krestova resident Joyce Van Bynen, who had 200 tonnes of bio solids applied to two acres in May, is sold on the product and said it helped revive her horse pasture within a short time.

The soil in the town is mainly sandy with little moisture retention and grows nothing but knapweed in the pastures. Van Bynen said that within two months of spreading the bio solids and grass seed, she has about 10 centimetres of lush grass for her horses to eat.

"There is nothing but good from this product. It's been tested seven ways from Sunday and has been proven to enhance the soil," said Van Bynen, who also works for Celgar, as an environmental technologist.

The bio solids are within six metres of her well and Van Bynen said she drinks from the same aquifer as the rest of the community.

"I am quite confident with what is in this material and that it is benign," she said, adding the bio solids have also been dumped on another property two kilometres from her own.

Before the bio solids are applied, the Environment Ministry requires Celgar to test the land and the bio solids for moisture content, trace metals such as arsenic, lead, mercury and pathogens.

Chris Stroich of the Environment Ministry said there is no sewage sludge in the Celgar bio solids.

Trace metal values for bio solids delivered to Krestova "have been well below that specified in the ministry's [Soil Amendment Code of Practice]," he said in an email.

However, Walter Popoff, regional director of Area H for the central Kootenay district, said "Krestova residents are right to be concerned. Basically, the residents are concerned for their health."

The [Environment Ministry] tests that are done, in their opinion, are not sufficient enough to make them feel safe," he said. "If this was being done beside me, this would be my concern also and I would want reassurance."

"No amount [of bio solids] is safe as far as I'm concerned," Kootnikoff said. "If it is so safe, why doesn't Celgar bag and sell it?"

Popoff will be meeting with the Environment Ministry later this month to discuss the issue.

CP PHOTO

Residents of the tiny community of Krestova say they concerned about solid waste from the Zellstoff Celgar pulp mill (shown above) being spread in their community.

CP PHOTO

Investigators look through the burned wreckage of a twin engine plane crash at Marshall Field in Vernon on Saturday.

Two killed in Vernon crash

Keven DREWS *The Canadian Press*

VERNON — Moments after taking off into the bright, sunny skies of British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, a small twin engine plane clipped two trees and slammed into a sports field, killing the two people onboard Saturday, say witnesses to the tragedy.

"I heard this explosion, looked over to see this aircraft burst into flames," said Gord Molendyk, a spokesman for the Vernon North Okanagan RCMP, who was in the area at the time

"There was fire, along the ground, right up to the aircraft."

Molendyk was supposed to be attending a wedding nearby early Saturday afternoon when he saw the aftermath of the accident.

He said the plane took off from the airport, hit the tops of two trees that were no more than eight metres high and flew over the edge of the field, before slamming into the ground and bursting into flames.

Molendyk said nobody on the ground was hurt.

The RCMP said in a release late Saturday night that the pilot was from Kelowna and that he was 59 years old. His passenger was described only as being 55 years old and from the Port Moody area. No names were released.

Bill Wilkie, vice-president of the Vernon Flying Club, was flying at the time of the crash and witnessed the aftermath of the tragedy from high above the scene.

"All I saw was this big plume of black smoke going up, oh, probably 500 feet and big, you know, flames at the bottom, bright yellow flames at the bottom," he said. "So you couldn't tell where the flames were coming from."

The victims, who had just filled up their aircraft with gas, weren't members of the local flying club, said Wilkie, noting he doesn't believe they were associated with skydivers who were in the area, either.

There was also no word on Saturday about where the plane had been headed.

Wilkie said he had to fly over the scene a second time before he could tell that a plane had crashed, and he suspects an engine may have failed.

"I suspect that it all happened so quickly for those fellows that they wouldn't know, they wouldn't have chance to respond, do anything, they'd just kind of grit their teeth and that's it," he said.

Police and the Coroners Service of British Columbia are investigating the crash and the Transportation Safety Board has been contacted.

Emergency personnel were able to put out the fire but the two people aboard the aircraft died at the scene, Molendyk said.

The weather at the time of the crash was sunny and dry, he said.

The wreckage of the aircraft has been removed from the crash site and police are asking anyone who may have seen or heard the crash to contact them.

Transit police charge two men over counterfeit passes

The Canadian Press

VANCOUVER — Transit Police in Metro Vancouver say two men are facing charges over the production of counterfeit passes.

Police say they and security officials began to notice some riders were presenting fake but good-quality government-issued transit passes about six months ago.

They say they began an investigation and identified a suspect who was operating mainly in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and the passes were allegedly being made to order.

Police say they launched a sting operation, arrested two suspects and seized computers, laminators, printers and dozens of passes ready for sale.

Arrested and charged are 47-year-old Jamie Stuart Richardson and 65-year-old Daniel Blair, who were scheduled to appear in court Friday.

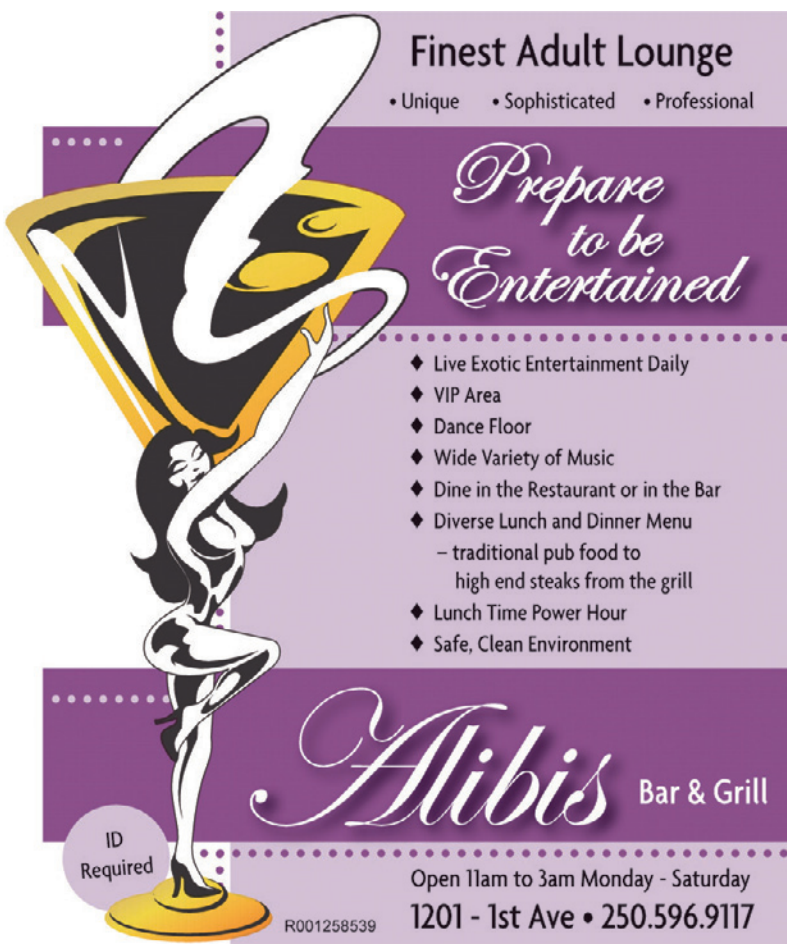
Police estimate the lost revenue to the transit system to be more than $200,000.

Search called off for canoeist

The Canadian Press

VICTORIA — Rescue officials say the coast guard has called off a search for a man who went missing when the canoe he and a friend were in capsized near Victoria.

Officials at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre say the accident took place Friday night in the Ten Mile Point area off Oak Bay.

Officials say one of the men was rescued at about 12:30 a.m. and taken to hospital, but searchers couldn't find the second man. The search was called off at approximately noon on Saturday.

At Home
Every Saturday, only in the Citizen!