



Association of  
**SUMMER VILLAGES**  
OF ALBERTA

November 10, 2014

Honourable Stephen Mandel  
Minister  
Alberta Health  
208 Legislature Building  
10800 - 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB  
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Mandel:

Re: Resolution ASVA 2014-04  
Improve Process of Issuing Health Advisories for Alberta's Lakes

The Association of Summer Villages of Alberta (ASVA), one of the 3 municipal associations (AUMA, AAMDC, and ASVA) in the province, held their annual convention October 17 – 18<sup>th</sup> this year in Edmonton. At that time four resolutions were voted on by the membership.

There was strong support for Resolution ASVA 2014-004 dealing with the process used by Alberta Health in issuing health advisories for Alberta's lakes due to observances of cyanobacteria resulting in lake closures.

This resolution, as attached, was approved by the ASVA membership and is being forwarded to you for your consideration and response.

Sincerely,

**ASSOCIATION OF SUMMER VILLAGES OF ALBERTA**

**Peter Pellatt**  
**President**



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**ASVA Resolution – 2014 – 04**

**Improve the process of issuing health advisories for Alberta's lakes**  
**Sponsor: Summer Village of Grandview**

**WHEREAS** many recreational lakes in Alberta have natural occurrences of Cyanobacteria (Blue Green Algae), and

**WHEREAS** Alberta Health Services routinely tests recreational lakes for the presence of Cyanobacteria (Blue Green Algae) and issues a health advisory for the entire lake when localized occurrences of bacteria/algae are found, and

**WHEREAS** for many of our lakes, the consequence of this process has been a significant reduction in recreational use, beaches which were once crowded are now near empty as tourism has decreased, local businesses are suffering and property values are dropping.", and

**WHEREAS** methodology of issuing these advisories could be improved to mitigate these unintended consequences,

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Association of Summer Villages of Alberta support the initiative of the Summer Village of Grandview in working with Alberta Health Services to improve the process of issuing health advisories for Alberta's lakes.

**Background**

Cyanobacteria (blue green algae) is a naturally occurring substance found in many lakes within Canada. Unfortunately, many land use practices in watersheds have upset the natural balance in the lakes' ecosystems, causing the occurrence of significant algae blooms in some lakes. It has been found that cyanobacteria (blue green algae) can produce toxins which may be damaging to human health.

Alberta Health Services has recently been charged with the task of monitoring recreational lakes for water quality concerns including cyanobacteria. Whenever visual evidence of cyanobacteria (blue green algae) is found, or when specified guidelines for cell count or toxin concentration are exceeded in a lake, a health advisory is issued. In most cases, this advisory remains in place for the remainder of the open water season even though the lake may have predominant areas of clear water.



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When an advisory is issued for a lake, signs are posted giving warning of the presence of cyanobacteria (blue green algae) and of the dangers of being in contact with the water. The sign also includes the international symbol for no swimming. Although the lake is not “closed”, the signs clearly dissuade people from entering the water. In addition, the press sensationalizes the matter when an advisory is issued by using file photographs depicting the worst situation in recent years rather than the current situation.

For many of our lakes, the consequence of this process has been a significant reduction in recreational use. Beaches which were once crowded are now near empty, local businesses are suffering and property values are dropping.

Lake monitoring and posting of a lake advisory needs to be an exercise of proportional response where the degree of action is in line with the risk involved. While safety is always of paramount concern, the monitoring program has shown that toxins rarely exceed Alberta’s health guidelines. Blue green algae have always been present in prairie lakes as evidenced by paleolimnology studies, and yet no one has ever died from it in Alberta from entering and enjoying the water. At present, there are 30 lakes with health advisories posted and it is the expectation that people will not enter these lakes from the time of the advisory for the remainder of the year. Since these same lakes are likely to receive advisories in all coming years, the foreseeable future looks bleak.

Prior to the change in monitoring procedures, Albertans recognized the concerns of swimming in waters with algae blooms. If the bloom was significant, they avoided that section of the lake. If it was minor or absent, they would enjoy the water and rinse off when finished. There is no reason why this approach may no longer be followed if people are properly informed. The current practice of overstating the dangers may actually serve to put people at greater risk by undermining the public’s confidence in the veracity of AHS’s information, a sort of “crying wolf” effect.

The Summer Village of Grandview has expressed concerns to Alberta Health Services over the reaction of the press in sensationalizing and misrepresenting the Health Advisory. We are working with AHS in finding a more effective method of lake monitoring which would integrate sound science with an appropriate balance of education, judgement and precaution.

Alberta’s lakes are meant to be enjoyed rather than feared. With improvements in lake monitoring processes, we can achieve this goal for the benefit of all Albertans without compromising safety.