



## Volunteer Water Sampling – An Important Community Service

By JUDITH GRANT

Ever since the summer of 2001, the Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations has run a volunteer program to sample and check the quality of the swimming water in Georgian Bay and Farlain Lake. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, which began its sampling program in Tiny in the 1960s or 70s, monitors water at the township's public beaches; Awenda Provincial Park does its four beaches; and Camp Marygrove checks its swimming water. Together, the sample results provide a sense of the general quality of Tiny's swimming water.

The Federation got involved to keep an eye on the privately owned and public stretches of shore that are not monitored by public bodies.

Until 2006, the volunteer program took place every year, but after that it moved to every second year.

In 2014, the information amassed by the Federation and official bodies (sample results, reports from special investigations conducted by the Severn Sound Environmental Association and by Allan Crow of Environment Canada and also from research undertaken by academic groups) was gathered together in an article in the Spring 2014 *Tiny Cottager*; this article is available in Issue Archives, [tinycottager.org](http://tinycottager.org). The startling results of the 2014 summer's volunteer sampling were discussed in an article in the Fall 2014 issue, which is also available in Issue Archives. These articles are also filed under Water Reports (see the list on the right side of the main page of [tinycottager.org](http://tinycottager.org)).

As noted in the first of these articles, the volunteer program has proven its worth in many ways. We have learned a great deal about the conditions that cause high E. coli counts (very rarely dangerous itself, the presence of E. coli indicates that dangerous pathogens may also be present). Several of Tiny's Councils have been persuaded to hire professionals to study problem areas of shore, and to undertake recommended actions. Through research it has been learned that though the sources of E. coli are many (cattle, pigs, wild animals, birds, and humans, in that order), the prevalence of pathogens dangerous to human health is greatest in cattle and least in birds. Surprisingly, we have discovered that some authorities set the danger line higher than the 100 E. coli per 100 mL of water that moves the Health Unit to recommend that a beach be posted: other provinces in Canada use 200, the USA uses 236, and Europe uses 900, discrepancies that may explain the Health Unit's recent decisions not to post warnings when the geometric mean of E. coli counts in samples at a beach are not much above 100 (see the sample results for 2014 on the *Tiny Cottager* website under Water Reports).

Now, as we approach the summer of 2016, it is time for beach associations to find volunteers willing to wade out to chest depth in the lake first thing on Monday mornings (Tuesday after a long weekend) in July and August and take a sample of the water at a designated spot in the way mandated by the Health Unit. These volunteers undertake a task essential to our ever-growing understanding of factors affecting the quality of swimming water in Tiny Township. As always there will be a training session ahead of time and supplies (bottles and forms) will be distributed at it. The task of sampling can be shared by a couple of people, but it must be done carefully and in the approved manner and places. Beach associations will be contacted in late May or early June about participation.

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