



A CHANCE TO RIDE IN THE TRUCK — Open Houses at local fire departments on Sunday gave everyone a chance to ride in the bright red fire truck. Even some of the older crowd, said it was the first time they had ever ridden in the truck, and their reason for doing it now was the grandchild in tow. Above, Bright firefighter Brandon Whittall, gives little Emily Schmidt a hand as she arrives back at the Bright fire station following a tour of the village streets.

Local dairy farmer draws attention to the issue of stray voltage

Drumbo dairy farmer Peter Stern has had “dancing cows” — but it is not because they are happy.

It is a description of cows that exhibit nervous and aggressive behaviour due to receiving excessive electrical current or “stray voltage” on a farm. The stray electrical current can pass through water troughs, equipment in the milking parlour, and in the soil on the farm.

Stern believes stray voltage has killed 100 head of dairy cattle on his farm in the last eight years.

Last Monday, about 40 people attended a presentation on stray voltage at Stern’s dairy farm, east of Drumbo.

Stray voltage is electrical current running between the ground and objects not intended to be electrified, such as farm equipment or other metal objects like water troughs.

Stray voltage can be found anywhere — either in a residential or rural area, but it is most commonly found at agricultural operations because of poorly grounded wires conducting electrical current in the presence of water.

Stern and a number of other milk producers contend that hydro lines running near their properties are improperly grounded and excessive stray voltage is harming the dairy cows.

In 2002, Stern moved his dairy operation to a new farm on Parkinson Road. In his first year at the new location, Stern’s dairy herd ranked second out of 350 dairy producers with a score of 950 points given by CanWest DHI (Dairy Herd Improvement), a milk recording service.

By 2013, the Stern farm ranking dropped to 180th, with a score of 526 points. Stern attributes the loss to the effects of stray voltage.

Dr. Magda Havas, BSc.,

Ph.D., who teaches environmental studies at Trent University presented the information on the effects of stray voltage to livestock and also to farmers.

Havas said stray voltage in dairy cattle reduces milk production, increases mastitis, foot sores, swollen joints, reduced fertility, causes miscarriages, and even death.

Havas said research in Denver and Manitoba showed higher incidence of cancer when residential plumbing conducted voltage.

In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Energy issued a directive to the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) to regulate stray voltage, “to ensure electricity service to farm customers, in relation to ‘tingle’ or ‘stray’ voltage, is of a quality that does not unduly impact the operation of the farm.” Farm Stray Voltage is included in the OEB Distribution System Code.

Since the directive was issued, there has been ongoing disagreement between farmers and the OEB as to whether the stray voltage is generated by hydro lines or if it has been generated by on-farm sources.

Don McCabe, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) worked with the Ministry of Energy on the directive.

“There is a committee that has been struck to review the Code to get a better understanding of procedures in place,” said McCabe. “We are lacking in accountability to this system to ensure that the testing is done properly and then being able to assess where the problem originates.”

“There is another complication,” continued McCabe. “There is stray voltage and there is ground current. It could be coming from Ontario Hydro system or from the farm and they have to identify the source.

But the result is that farmers



PETER STERN

are experiencing terrible conditions for their livelihood and it is an issue of concern. The OFA is very conscious of the need to bring stronger measures to the countryside.”

Alicia Sayers, Hydro One communications officer said, “We recently arranged a pilot program with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) on a few farms. The pilot will look at ways to assess and mitigate instances of stray voltage and current. This includes how both customer-owned and utility-operated systems contribute to stray voltage on farms. We will also explore alternative approaches to improve our customer experience.”

“The hands-on pilot provides an opportunity to learn and identify solutions,” Sayers continued. “We expect the pilot to end this fall and will then begin work on implementing all solutions that we and the OFA identify. This will also help shape Hydro One policies with our farming customers and communities.”

Doug Brown of Browndale Farms near Paris was at the Stern farm on Monday.

In 2007, after noticing a drop in milk production, Brown contacted the local hydro company to discuss readings that were taken on his farm. He was told

that anything less than 10 volts was acceptable. A specialist said there were three volts detected between water bowls and the milk line. Brown then wrote to the OEB because he was told that current in excess of .5 volts could affect the performance and health of his dairy herd.

“We shut off all the power coming from the road and he still got a reading of 1.8 volts with no power coming in through the power lines,” said Brown. “We also got a reading of up to four volts in the farm house that was only five years old [in 2007].”

Hydro One responded to the letter and installed a blocker to ground the current.

The blocker cut back on the ground current, but Brown is still facing challenges today.

“It’s a silent killer,” said Brown.

Donald Zipse, an electrical forensics specialist from the United States also made a presentation at the Stern farm. He has published several papers and videos on the issue of stray voltage and its effect on dairy cattle. He suggested steps for the utility companies to take that would rectify stray current.

On Wednesday, Stern will be attending the Blandford-Blenheim council meeting to make a presentation.

Some voter cards mailed to Ayr have incorrect polling station

About 200 Ayr residents who were instructed to vote in Cambridge should be looking for a replacement Voter Information Card for the October 19 federal election.

Recently, a voter brought an information card into the Ayr News to ask why Ayr residents were voting at Avenue Road Baptist Church in Cambridge.

The correct polling station should be at the Ayr Community Centre hall.

The Ayr News contacted Elections Canada who said they had been aware of the error for over a week, and it affected only people living in Ayr. Any residents with questions about their riding are encouraged to call 1-800-463-6868.



Booms set up to contain the oil spill. Photo by Paul Cabral.

Truck overturns and causes an oil spill near Orr’s Lake

Work was completed last Friday at 1435 Roseville Road to clean up about 20 litres of oil spilled into a ditch when a gravel truck overturned, dumping a load of gravel.

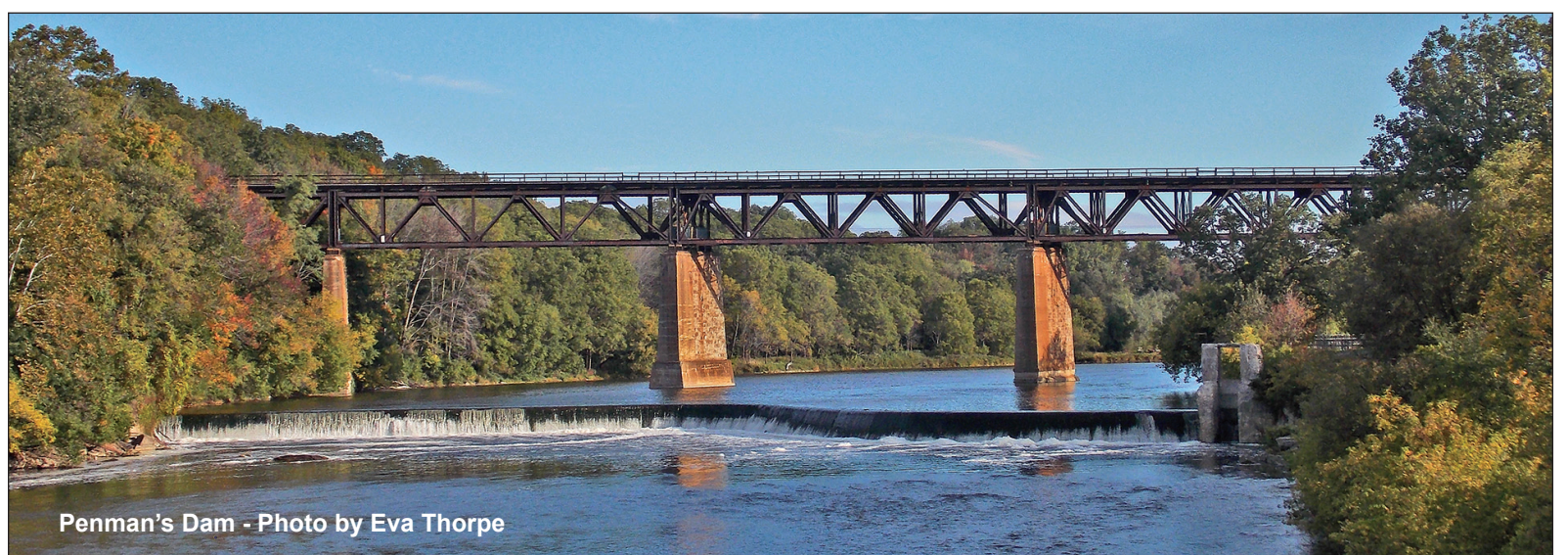
The ditch is near Orr’s Lake, an environmentally sensitive area. Several neighbours came to the rescue of wildlife, taking them to a local veterinary for cleanup.

At the time of the spill, emergency crews and the Ministry of the Environment attended the scene and the contractor hired by the Region of Waterloo spent a week cleaning up the area.

“The Ministry attended the site today [Friday] to confirm that the cleanup is complete,” said Greta Najcler, MoECC supervisor. “We have been advised that the region contractor will return to the site to ensure that repairs to the shoulder of the road and the site are intact. Booms will remain in the creek to collect any residual oil, but there doesn’t appear to be anything.”

Najcler said the oil was contained to the ditch and a drainage pipe that flows to Orr’s lake.

There is no estimate on the cost to clean up the spill.



Penman’s Dam - Photo by Eva Thorpe

County moves forward with \$7-million upgrade to Penman’s Dam

The County of Brant has big plans to replace the aging structure at Penman’s Dam and install a turbine to harness hydroelectric power. The historic dam spans the Grand River in downtown Paris.

Recently, council approved an application to the Small Communities Fund (SCF) for the first phase of the project, which is the repair of the dam structure, at an estimated cost of \$3.75-million. If successful, the SCF will fund 66% of the cost of the project.

The second phase of the project is the installation of a turbine, estimated to cost \$3.3-million.

“The dam would have to be redesigned to accommodate the turbine,” said Bruce Noble, manager of Brant Municipal Enterprises. “The dam is an iconic part of the community, and any retro-fit or build would have to be respectful of that. One of the major things we want to do is to be highly sensitive to the historical value of the dam.”

Noble said the return in the investment could be \$40-million over the lifetime of the turbine.

The dam was constructed over 100 years ago to supply power to the former Penman’s Manufacturing Company, a textile company in Paris.

“All of the structural components need to be renewed,” said Michael Bradley, manager of corporate services. “The structure of the dam is in poor shape with the concrete structure sitting on a wood and crumbling stone base. New footings would be required to anchor a new dam.”

In April, lights were turned on that illuminate Penman’s Dam, a \$75,000 project led by the Paris Firefighter’s Club, and supported by private sector donors. The lights can be viewed from Sunday to Thursday, dusk until 10:30 p.m.; and dusk until 12:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

MNRF says pit at 579 Brant-Waterloo is operating according to licence

Following complaints from neighbours about a gravel pit at 579 Brant-Waterloo Road, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) did an inspection and found that the owner, Network Sand and Gravel is in compliance with pit regulations.

“MNRF inspected the site on Wednesday, September 23, 2015 and met with the licensee to discuss the importation of fill condition on the ARA site plan,” said Diane Schwier, MNRF Aggregate Technical Specialist. “MNRF determined that the licensee is operating in compliance with their site plan under the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA).” The property is a grandfathered pit because it has been in operation since the 1970s, before ARA regulations controlled pit activities.

Network Sand and Gravel has made application to amend a by-law so that asphalt and concrete can be recycled at the pit. Recently, at a public meeting for the application, a number of neighbours had

complaints about the 43-hectare (104 acres) pit including extended hours, speeding trucks, and suspicious loads coming into the pit.

Neighbours asked that testing be done at the pit.

“MNRF did not sample any material at this site,” said Schwier. “According to the conditions on the ARA site plan, the licensee is required to test the fill material at the source prior to importing it to the site for rehabilitation. The fill material must meet Table 1 of the Ministry of the Environment’s (MOE) Soils, Ground Water and Sediment Standards for use under Part XV.1 of the Environmental Protection Act.”

Earlier this year, MNRF issued a licence suspension to Network Sand and Gravel for importing illegal fill at the pit. The suspension was lifted within a few days after the area was fully restored. Council will be making a decision on the pit’s recycling application at a future meeting.



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