

## Girl Scout stencils discourage pollution of Lake Michigan

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When residents pour gasoline, household chemicals or dog feces down stormwater drains in Highland Park, the pollutants flow into Lake Michigan or the North Branch of the Chicago River.

To discourage the practice, the **Ravinia Neighbors Association** is painting stenciled warnings next to sewer grates in their area as well as other parts of town.

The project has received strong support from city and state elected officials, funding from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and pavement painting help from Brownie Girl Scouts of Troop 2491 working on their "Earth is Our Home" Try-it Badges.

The IEPA gave the association \$4,900 toward the project with a required matching 40 percent contribution by the Association.

State Senator Susan Garrett, D-29th, of Lake Forest, lent her support to Ravinia neighbors with a letter of support. The project is consistent with Garrett's current efforts to clean Lake Michigan.

"I think what makes this even better is that it is a grass-roots effort," she said.

By keeping contaminants out of storm water sewers, residents show they want to keep their city's lakes and rivers clean.

"That really deserves a lot of support and recognition," Garrett said.

One of the stencil warnings, decorated with three mosquito-eating black-striped top minnows, states: "Dump No Waste/Drains to Chicago River." A second one decorated with a lake trout, states: "Dump No Waste/Drains to Lake Michigan." Green Bay Road is the watershed divide that determines which stencil should be used.

**Peggy Laemle, recording secretary of the Ravinia Neighbors Association**, said paint, garden, lawn and pool chemicals, paint remover, pet waste, automotive fluids are a major source of pollution for lakes and rivers.

"People just randomly use (stormwater drains) as a sewer," said Laemle. "The biggest problem may be dog walkers who don't want to take anything home."

She said city public works officials often find stormwater pipes clogged with blue plastic daily newspaper bags filled with dog feces.

Public Works Superintendent Bill Stewart said the regular disposal of the bags creates a mass that gets carried through pipes during storm events and causes blockages at pipe-joints. Trash thrown from vehicles does the same thing. Stewart once found a doormat clogging a storm sewer.

Laemle asked for volunteers to help take this public education project everywhere in Highland Park.

People can call her at (847) 432-7476, or e-mail her at [laemle@aol.com](mailto:laemle@aol.com).

"It doesn't take much time," she said.

At the urging of council member Mari Barnes, the Highland Park city council unanimously approved giving the **Ravinia Neighbors Association** a \$2,368 advance on their IEPA grant so they could start sooner. The city's money will be repaid by the association from grant funds.

In addition, the city provided orange warning cones for the street, safety vests and a saw horse with a warning sign. The equipment helps protect people spraying the street next to a drain.

Bill Stewart said the Public Works Department now buys a grate with the same type of message-- "All Waste Goes to Lake" -- permanently embossed in the design.

"We use those (new grates) as replacements when we go in and need to tear one up," he said.

Eventually, all city grates will have the warning message on them.

Brownie Girl Scouts, troop leaders and parents helped inaugurate the stenciling project April 24 near Ravinia School.

"The kids were really excited about it because it was in front of their school," said Troop Leader Judy Friedman. "They loved it. They had a good time. Part of the project was putting out door-hangers. They were fish-shaped door-hangers."

Friedman said one mission of scouting is to do community service projects, and this was a good one to do. Later, when Scouts were asked what they had enjoyed doing during the year, several mentioned the stenciling project.

Brownie Girl Scouts working on the project with troop leaders Friedman and Lynne Karmin, and parents, were Emily Cermak, Keely Dee, Sophie Friedman, Isabel Hall, Rachel Karmin, Samantha Klein, Stephanie Koenig, Kayla Moller, Ella Pestine, Cassie Reitmeyer, Chloe Seghers, Amanda Tazioli, Christine Wahlgren and Alyssa Whitworth.

Barring rain, June 16 is the next scheduled date for members of the **Ravinia Neighbors Association** to work on Pleasant Avenue.

Garrett said she hopes more people learn about the project and start doing it in their neighborhood or town. Practical projects like this can help clean water, she said.

"That can only be a good thing," Garrett said.