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Protect Okanagan Lake from excessive urban runoff

By [Kathy Michaels - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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During heavy rains, all manner of urban waste could be swept away and diverted to local lakes and streams through an antiquated storm water system.

That and the risks associated with it, says one Kelowna city councillor, needs near immediate attention.

"We can't keep dumping urban runoff into the lake," said Coun. Robert Hobson after it was revealed that there are 123 outfalls around the city that pick up storm water and divert it, unfiltered, into local lakes and streams.

"We need to direct money from sewage into managing storm water...the Okanagan Basin Water Board says urban runoff is a major threat to the lake."

The weakness in the system came to the fore following an update on practices used to mitigate environmental risk during last summer's Stewart Centre blaze. As fire crews attacked the blaze, around 2.5 million litres of contaminated water was removed from the scene, but a drain within the building allowed water from inside the building to flow directly into the sewer undetected.

Officials didn't know that the pesticide and fertilizer rich run-off had made it to Mill Creek until the next morning, when a Kelowna resident called in to find out why the water was discoloured and smelly. In the days that followed hundreds of fish turned up dead along the streams banks, while beach goers were barred entry to a handful of beaches.

While the situation had the makings of a large-scale crisis, it was mere days until the

waterway was deemed safe for entry, but questions were raised over whether or not the situation was handled in the best manner possible.

Monday's presentation from John Vos, the city's manager of community services, compared Kelowna's actions to the practices in other communities as a means to address those concerns.

"If there was a similar fire, it's likely the same thing would occur," said Vos.

Different locations throughout the city come with different risks, he explained. To get a better grip on what's out there, city staff and the fire department have co-ordinated to suss out 1,500 businesses that are supplied with chemicals that could have similar detrimental effects on the environment.

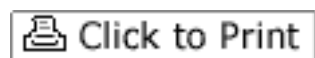
They're also reaching out to others to improve their response and have considered getting an environmental consultant on retainer, should another crisis be sparked.

"We are networking to seek out best practices," he said, adding later, "Nobody considers killing off fish.... or pollutants going into the lake, as an ideal practice."

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