

# SAFE QUIET LAKES STAKEHOLDER MEETING

PORT CARLING, APRIL 7, 2017

## SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### INTRODUCTION

At the sixth annual Safe Quiet Lakes Stakeholder meeting a set of six discussion groups were held to explore two important topics:

- 1) Incidents on the water
- 2) Boat wakes.

Discussion was animated and provided valuable perspectives and insights into problems as well as suggestions for creative, concrete solutions. A summary follows.



# TOPIC 1. INCIDENTS ON THE WATER

## DISCUSSION TOPIC

**“Most people would respond to a serious accident by calling 911, but what should a person do about lesser incidents including collisions, accidents, boating too close to shore, illegal mufflers or any reckless or inappropriate activity?”**

## SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

### a) What types of incident have you experienced?

A large range of incidents were mentioned, including:

- Boats drive too close to docks.
- High speeds boats drive too close to shore.
- Boats and swimmers don't mix, especially in channels. Swimmers are sometimes reckless, swimming in active boating lanes.
- Boats don't follow right-of way rules – either the driver doesn't know the rules or ignores them.
- PWCs interfere with larger boats (e.g. tow boats) by wake-jumping, hot-dogging.
- Kids on PWCs act irresponsibly, e.g. chase loons with chicks.
- Tow boats, especially PWCs, operate without spotters.
- Skiing etc. too close to rafts, other boats.
- Noise – especially boats operating with open tail pipes.

### b) Why do incidents occur?

1) Lack of knowledge:

- of speed restrictions, right-of-way rules, etc.

2) Lack of care:

- Disregard for rules
- Lack of consideration for others: boaters, swimmers, those on shore
- Alcohol and drugs

3) Lack of experience:

- The apparent increase in boat rentals and cottage rentals means that there are more inexperienced boaters on the water.
- Transient boat users (e.g. from other lakes) anchor, swim without knowledge and skills.

## c) Barriers to reporting or dealing with incidents

Everyone knows to call 911 in a life-threatening emergency, but there is great uncertainty about other important problems. Should one talk to neighbours, the cottage association, the municipality, the OPP?

- People are concerned that they could become embroiled in legal/police/court process. They are concerned about escalation.
- Many are unaware of Good Samaritan provisions that protect citizens who respond to emergency situations.
- “We are hesitant to call police because of fear of intimidation”.
- “Past experience does not produce results,” for example, a complaint is not followed up or the person reporting the incident is passed from one office to another.

## d) Potential solutions arising from the discussion

The goal is to create a culture of cooperation and respect among the many groups who use the lakes and waterways.

There is a broad consensus that education and information must drive this initiative, and that legislation and enforcement are necessary supports.

### **Education at the global level**

- Special educational events need to be well publicized.
- More information on existing noise by-laws is needed.
- Inform the public about safe practices with newer water devices such as water toys, fly boards etc.
- Work with boat rental companies to educate boat renters.
- Promote apps such as the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) “Discover Boating Safety” app.
- Every boat should have a right-of-way diagram in a clearly visible location, e.g. on the dashboard.

### **Individual and community action**

- “Get your own house in order” – make sure you are ready, have the right equipment, and know the rules and the law.
- Speak with offenders first, before calling police. Communicate with neighbours in a friendly way.
- Should we mark shoals and obstacles? While this could prevent accidents, there is confusion about the legality of markers and the requirements for setting out buoys, rafts, etc. Should municipalities play a role in this?

- Make a “wall of shame” with photos of offenders. This may be effective in smaller communities.
- Cottage associations can identify point people or stewards who can channel complaints in an appropriate direction.
- Create a map of your lake with the 30-m limit clearly marked. This is especially useful on smaller lakes, bays and channels.
- Build a sense of community with newcomers and renters – inform them of local values and community norms.
- When kids are involved in inappropriate behaviour, talk to the parents.
- On one lake, the “worst culprit” was put in charge of boating safety, with positive results.

### **Enforcement**

- Inform the public who to call about what. Provide one or two specific numbers. Municipalities, Associations, local media, police, etc. should all promote this information on their websites and in their mail outs.
- The new OPP complaint line may help to fill this information gap.
- A successful example: Skiers were going too close to a swimming raft at municipal beach. Police were called, and they educated the offender. Problem solved.

### **Media and outreach**

- Police should report incident statistics in local media on a regular basis.

## TOPIC 2. BOAT WAKES

### DISCUSSION TOPIC

**“Are boat wakes a problem in your area? If so, what are your major concerns? What are some potential solutions?”**

### SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

#### What problems do boat wakes cause?

The past decade or two have seen a steady increase in the number and size of power boats in Muskoka. Larger wakes and their associated problems are a result.

The Twp. of Georgian Bay resolution lists eight areas:

“...a boat’s wake can do a great deal of damage, including,

- the erosion of shorelines
- the swamping of nests of loons and other waterfowls
- the damaging of docks and vessels moored at docks and at marina gas pumps
- the danger to swimmers
- the interference with safe navigation
- the disruption of wetland habitat
- the upsetting of canoes and small boats, especially in narrow channels”.

The discussion groups mentioned each of these issues and emphasized that floating docks are particularly vulnerable. Floating docks are typically used in relatively protected areas, where boat wakes can be larger than any naturally occurring waves. Wakes can:

- Tear docked boats from their moorings;
- Cause physical damage to the dock (“Wakes ruin floating docks”);
- Toss people standing on the dock into the water.

#### Related issues

The 9-10 km/hr. limit is not effective in reducing wakes for most boats in the Muskokas. While larger boats ride flat at this speed, boats less than about 20 feet at the waterline will have their bows up, and therefore create considerable wakes.

Many boaters are not aware of the 9-10 kph speed limit within 30 m. of shore.

There is no speed limit beyond 30 m from shore, but wakes created much further out can cause damage.

Boat wakes (and other issues) create social tension, tearing up the social fabric of the cottage community.

## Potential solutions arising from discussion

### Education at the global level

- “Slow down, Bow down” – make it like no drinking and driving.
- No wake – idle speed – is a much better approach than 10 km/hr.
- Wake surfing is becoming more popular than boarding. It can be done in the middle of the lake – no need to be in calmer water near shore.
- Hold a Safe Towing Day – educational initiative with Municipal Councils and Marinas.
- Education: Boat dealers are critical in educating renters and cottagers.
- Provide information based on research about wake damage.

### Individual and community action

- Talk to the boat owner.
- In narrow channels, those on shore can use air horns to notify boat owners that they are going too fast.
- Create and distribute a map that shows erosion caused by wakes. It is simple to gather evidence, document the problem and build case. Lake Vernon has done this.
- Encourage voluntary limits on the times and locations of certain activities. For example, a ski school limits its hours (not in the early morning or evening), and regularly changes locations.
- Provide more signage.
- Keep a natural shoreline – it is more resistant to erosion than a manicured one.
- Place a sandwich board your dock – “Please Bow down, Slow down”, and on back side, “Thank you”. Respectful. Friendly. Neighbourly.
- De-stress when you get to the cottage – don’t tear around on boats, etc.

### Regulatory

- Can municipalities use Environmental Protection zoning in sensitive areas to reduce wake damage?

# UMBRELLA THEMES

## a) Problems

- People don't know the regulations and laws: some recognize they are uninformed and wish access to straightforward information and resources; others are unaware of their lack of basic knowledge.
- People do not know who to call for what type of incident. Educate people who to call about what. Provide specific numbers. Municipalities, Associations, local media, police, etc. should consistently promote these numbers on their websites and in their mail outs.
- Renters, transient users of boats and new cottagers are special groups needing timely education and information.
- One aspect of the cultural issue is that some people use the lakes to escape the constraints of the urban world – they resist limitations on their activities when at the cottage or on the lake.

## b) Solutions

- Education and building awareness is the preferred approach to a wide variety of problems. It is essential for behavioural and cultural change. Nonetheless, change can be supported and accelerated through a) enforcement, and b) building appropriate legal frameworks at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.
- Partnership is essential in bringing about change. The local community of cottagers and residents, the associations, the marinas, the elected officials and their staff in all jurisdictions, hotels and resorts, boat manufacturers, boating and swimming instructors, etc.
- There is a large role for cottage associations to take creative steps with regard to the issues on the lakes:
  - Education
  - Promoting positive norms
  - Channeling response to problems in the right direction
  - Acting in concert with other associations and organizations.
- There are a growing number resources of safe boating resources available e.g., NMNA app, “Discover Boating Safety”, Boating Ontario resources, SQL, Navionix app, Boat Smart resources – but there is no one up-to-date, go-to inventory.
- A major focus of education should be with children and young people e.g. residential and day camps, ski camps, sailing camps, swimming lessons, etc.
- Cultural change in the behaviour of boaters and swimmers grows through respectful positive communication rather confrontation and conflict.
- Use social media for positive messaging.