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Hot weather and seaweed “pools” combine to create unpleasant odour in Willow Point

The source of an unpleasant sewage-like odour has been identified by staff at the City of Campbell River. Working with the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the City was able to confirm today that the source of the odour is decaying seaweed found in a series of small pools along the shoreline of Willow Point.

“We began investigating this smell last week, working with officials from Public Health, the Department of Fisheries and Ocean, and the Ministry of the Environment,” said Jennifer Peters, Utilities Manager with the City of Campbell River. *“The good news is that it’s only seaweed. The unfortunate news is that because the small pools are located on the sensitive foreshore, there is no way to eradicate the smell without damaging the tide pool ecosystems.”*

These small pools have been located along the beach near Willow Point, containing a type of seaweed called sea-lettuce. Decaying sea lettuce emits hydrogen sulphide gas which smells like sulfur or rotten eggs and is often mistaken for sewage. These odours generally occur when temperatures are hot, as they have been in recent weeks in Campbell River. They intensify when water gets trapped and collects in pools or ponds.

Staff thoroughly investigated the source of the smell. The first step was to do full inspections of the drainage outfall areas along the shore. There had been some question as to whether a sewage spill was the cause of the smell. This possibility was ruled out when City operational staff checked drainage outfalls and sanitary sewer systems in the area and found no leaks, spills or damage. Staff and the Health Authority were also able to confirm that an earlier spill that happened July 4 at Simms Creek was in no way related to the current odour in Willow Point.

The City has received many calls from residents in the past two weeks, asking about the source of the odour. Many callers provided their own theories about the source. Some people suggested it might be related to damage from the car that recently crashed into the Willow Point Hall, some asked if a dead seal was to blame, and others suggested there was a link to the 19A project. These theories were considered, and, in the end, each proved to be incorrect.

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