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For Immediate Release
Feb. 22, 2005

SOUTH BASS ISLAND INVESTIGATION PRELIMINARY REPORT RELEASED

SOUTH BASS ISLAND – Contaminated water was the most likely source of gastrointestinal illness reported last summer that sickened 1,450 residents and visitors to South Bass Island, public and environmental health officials said today. Measures continue to be taken to limit exposure to that contaminated water during the 2005 season, they said.

“Several studies – including testing of private wells, case-control studies, epidemiological investigations and extensive testing of public drinking supplies – point to widespread ground water contamination,” said Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “Effective measures to limit exposure to the contaminated water will be in place for the upcoming season.”

Today, public and environmental health professionals from ODH, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Ottawa County Health Department (OCHD) convened a public information session on South Bass Island to release the results from the preliminary report to island residents, business owners and local officials.

The number of people reporting illness dropped dramatically last summer after ODH recommended drinking only bottled or boiled water when unsure of the source and Ohio EPA issued No Use Orders for public drinking water systems found to have pathogens that may make people sick.

Since that time, several actions have been, or soon will be, taken to limit exposure to contaminated water. These include: expansion of the water treatment plant, extension of water lines and the use of hauled water to businesses outside the village.

“We have confidence in the safety of water supplied by the village water system, businesses connected to it and wells outside the village that fall under Ohio EPA regulation,” said Joe Koncelik, director of the Ohio EPA.

This summer, Ohio EPA-approved signs will be posted at the entrances to buildings served by an Ohio-EPA regulated source. If there is not an Ohio EPA sign at the door, you should consider drinking only bottled water or boiling tap water vigorously for one minute before, eating, drinking, brushing teeth or making prepared drinks.

Some wells outside the village of Put-in-Bay are not regulated by the Ohio EPA. According to the preliminary report, more than three-fourths of private wells tested positive for total coliforms and nearly one-third tested

positive for E. coli. OCHD, in conjunction with ODH, met with private well owners on the island Oct. 30, 2004, to discuss prevention measures such as continuous disinfecting and testing.

“Private wells are still a concern,” said Nancy Osborn, Ottawa County Health Commissioner. “Anyone unsure of the water supply should consider drinking bottled water or boiling their water.”

She said concerned well owners can call the OCHD at 419-734-6800 for more information, including testing.

The report issued today by ODH is the first of its kind under Section 3701.14 of the Ohio Revised Code which was passed by the 125th Ohio General Assembly as Senate Bill 6. To date, the ODH director’s investigation of gastrointestinal illness among residents and visitors to South Bass Island is the only one of its kind under this law.

Copies of the investigation’s preliminary report and frequently asked questions and answers are available on the ODH Web site at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov>.

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