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Efforts to make beaches safer commendable

March 21, 2013
The Mining Journal

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While the heavy snow pack covering the ground doesn't have many area residents thinking of enjoying a day at the beach, Marquette city officials are focused in on just that.

That focus includes two projects the city is undertaking that should make visits to the beach more enjoyable - as well as safer - this summer.

One involves using new equipment to test the water for the presence of E. coli bacteria that should reduce beach closures. The other is a redesign of South Beach to make it less susceptible to E. coli contamination.

The first effort uses a test developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that reduces the time to determine the quality of a water sample to three hours from 24 hours, which was the time frame under the conventional test used for many years.

Under an EPA grant program, the city and the Superior Watershed Partnership test the water quality at city beaches twice a week during the swimming season. If the average of three samples from a beach shows more than 300 parts E. coli per 100 ml of water, state regulations dictate the beach must be closed until the levels decrease.

Under the old scenario, the city had to wait at least a day, with the beach closed, to find out if the E Coli level had dropped to an acceptable level to open the beach.

With the faster test, which the city used under a pilot program late last summer, the beach could be reopened the same day, rather than no sooner than 24 hours later.

Last summer, beaches were closed several times for elevated E. coli levels, including South Beach being closed five times.

City officials determined the closures were partially due to the physical aspects of South Beach, including its low-lying nature that holds moisture and its attractiveness to birds. Bird droppings often contain E. coli.

Using grant funds from another EPA program, the city plans to raise the beach by dumping loads of clean sand on it and plant dune grass, which will be aimed at deterring birds from landing on the beach.

With long stretches of pristine Lake Superior beaches, the city should be commended for undertaking these efforts to make a day at the beach more enjoyable and safer for residents and visitors to the area.

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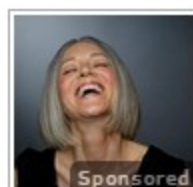
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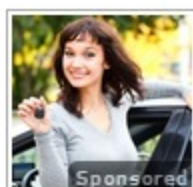
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