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Cohasset

With Earth Month underway, Cohasset officials want residents to remember that trash and yard waste have their place – at the town dump, not in the local water supply.

Water Commissioner Leonora Jenkins is speaking out against pollution in the Ellms Meadow well field, raising the matter during a recent Board of Selectmen meeting.

“Some of the selectmen were unaware that the neighborhood was dumping their yard waste and brush on the town property,” Jenkins explained in an email. “I indicated that this has been a problem for a very long time and with the well field just being reopened [on March 26] that provides at least 20 percent of the town’s water supply, we would like to alleviate this problem.”

During a recent walk along James Lane and Cushing Road, Jenkins pointed out trash and even discarded Christmas trees littering the town-owned property.

The well field “should be the gem” of the town’s water supply, said Jenkins – not a trash heap.

Residents should be aware that since the well field opened on March 26, “we’re getting so much of our water from there,” said Jenkins. “Within the first week it was opened, it was producing 27 percent of the total demand. And that was just in the first week; it’s increased a little since then.”

The well field will stay open “until the ground becomes frozen,” and the percentage of water coming from Ellms Meadow will only change if the water table is too low, such as in the case of drought, Jenkins explained.

The water commissioner reminded that all of the water in the town buildings is produced from the water department – including the children’s drinking water in schools.

Dumping yard waste there might not seem like a major problem, however the water commissioner explained that chemicals from the lawn waste could leach into the water supply.

“We have no idea what the area residents are using on their lawns and what is being dumped in this sensitive area,” said Jenkins, explaining that former water commissioner John McNabb had a bylaw passed several years ago that deals with treating lawns in the Cohasset watershed area.

“The one thing that is repeatedly stated are acts that will degrade the water supply and the dumping of brush and yard waste containing unknown fertilizers, herbicides or animal fecal matter can have an impact on the town water supply,” Jenkins explained.

The chief concern is that Ellms Meadow produces the highest quality, lowest costing water in town – and the water department would like to keep it that way. Water Commission

chairman Peter DeCaprio, who is wrapping up his service on the board, told the selectmen Tuesday that Ellms Meadow has "our lowest costing, best water" in Cohasset.

Jenkins reiterated this in a phone call Wednesday. "It costs less than to have the water come from there rather than Lily Pond, which costs so much because of the treatment."

Water from Ellms Meadow costs \$121 per million gallons (mg) while Lily Pond costs \$285/mg, said Jenkins.

DeCaprio pointed out that the dumping problems occurs "not just at Ellms Meadow; we find we have to pick up trash at all our" well fields. "We're not sure how to stop it."

Selectman Karen Quigley said that public education should help.

"Most people probably don't realize that's contributing to the water supply," said Quigley. "Unless people become knowledgeable and educated, they don't ask."

### Signage

Selectman Martha Gjestebj said there should be a "no dumping" sign posted at the well field to help prevent polluting. Jenkins said in a phone call that there are some signs posted, and she has contacted Director of Project Management and Planning Brian Joyce to have more made.

Jenkins said the signage issue would be an agenda item for the Thursday, April 17 Water Commission meeting (after the Mariner's print deadline).

In the meantime, there are other ways to mitigate the issue – letting residents know what, exactly, they should do with their yard waste.

"All of the material that is being dumped here – brush, tree limbs, old Christmas trees, lawn clippings, leaves, etc. – is accepted for free at the [Recycling Transfer Facility] as is your regular household trash when you purchase a facility sticker," said Jenkins.

Cohasset Boy Scouts also provide a community service, picking up Christmas trees in January.

There are also regularly posted brush days at the RTF, which are printed in the Mariner. Residents can burn brush in their yards until May 1; burning permits are available through the Fire Department, at the station or via the town website ([cohassetmass.org](http://cohassetmass.org)).

Following these protocols will eliminate unnecessary fines, said Jenkins. "So it is not as though there is no other way to eliminate this material from the homeowners' yard at little (minimal fire permit fee) or no cost, besides illegally dumping it on town-owned land that contains the water supply."