

## World Health Organization: Sewage In Water Threatens Gazans

WHO Report: Sewage in Water Threatens Gazans

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by Mel Frykberg (IPS) GAZA CITY - Gaza is being forced to pump 77 tonnes of untreated or partially treated sewage out to sea daily due to the Israeli blockade of the coastal territory. The fear is that some of this is creeping back into drinking water.

"The health of Gaza's 1.5 million people is at risk," Mahmoud Daher, from the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) told IPS following a report released by WHO after it carried out a number of tests on Gaza's contaminated water.

On the ground Israel's closure has translated into a lack of fuel, electricity and spare parts needed to operate wastewater and sewerage treatment plants. Consequently Gaza's water and sanitation systems are near complete collapse as the power required to run treatment and desalination plants, pump water to homes, and pump sewage away from populated areas is only available on a very limited basis.

Following Hamas' takeover in Gaza last year, after it won legislative elections in 2006, Israel designated the densely populated strip of 360 square kilometres hostile territory and sealed off the borders, enforcing an embargo which is supported by the international community.

Since then the Jewish state has allowed only a trickle of humanitarian goods into Gaza, and only after intense international pressure and intervention. Besides drastically reducing fuel and electricity supplies, Israel has also barred import of most vital

technical parts, which humanitarian organizations argue are necessary if Gaza's basic infrastructure is to operate.

In order to assess the degree of sewage contamination WHO took seawater samples from 13 risky areas in the five governorates of the Gaza Strip. Two microbiological tests were carried out to examine the presence of human and animal faeces.

The results revealed that three areas in Gaza and one area in the Rafah governorate (30.8 percent) are polluted with human faeces (Faecal Coliform) and animal faeces (Faecal Streptococcus), and three areas in Gaza city (23.1 percent) are polluted with animal faeces.

The danger is that this contaminated sea water is leaking into Gaza's underground water aqueduct following a two-year drought. The drought has meant that the 160 million cubic metres of water extracted every year from Gaza's underground water supply is not being replenished as the strip received only an annual average of 85 million cubic metres of rain over the last couple of years.

"The deficit is being replaced by sewage-polluted seawater which is leaking back into the aqueduct, and we are forced to dig further and further into the ground to try and replenish supplies," Monther Shoblak, general manager of Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), the body responsible for water and sanitation, told IPS.

"We are extremely concerned about a possible outbreak of water-borne diseases such as typhoid, cholera, dysentery, and gastroenteritis," added Daher.

Following WHO's water analysis results, the Palestinian Water Authority last month

told Gazans to boil all water before cooking or drinking, following a shortage of hypochlorite, the chemical used to clean water, due to the blockade.

WHO also warned that nitrates in Gaza's drinking water coming from leaking sewage and agricultural chemicals in the groundwater are 13 times higher than international safety standard levels.

Doctors in Gaza have indicated that the high levels of nitrates are partly responsible for the rising number of Palestinians suffering from anaemia, although poverty and malnutrition, exacerbated by the economic embargo and the resulting decimation of the territory's economy are also to blame.

Further aggravating the situation are the power and fuel shortages, and the limited number of fuel pumps and water filters. This has meant that Gaza's 135 drinking water wells, three treatment plants and four storm-water pumping stations, which all run on petrol and electricity, are almost at a standstill.

Only 20 of the water wells are connected to electricity and due to electricity cuts they are forced to operate by means of emergency generators, but there is not always sufficient fuel to keep the generators operating.

According to CMWU only 37 of the 122 water supply pumps have fuel. This translates into 30% of Gazans having access to running water for four to eight hours once every week, 40% once every four days and 30% once every 2 days.

Financial and technical help from the international community is available. But three planned and internationally financed wastewater treatment plants have been put on hold due to the blockade, Mike Bailey, Oxfam's Jerusalem-based advocacy and me-

dia manager told IPS.

Oxfam is a partner of CMWU and is involved in financing and building a number of water and sewage related projects all over the Palestinian territories.

"The World Bank is behind the financing of one treatment plant in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza, the German Development Bank is backing one in the middle of the Gaza Strip and the Japanese government is bankrolling one in Khan Yunis in the south," said Bailey.

But despite the funds being available, due to the closure they have all been forced to suspend operations as no contractors will take the work on as they know they will not be able to import the necessary building materials, and the Israelis will not allow them entry into the territory, said Bailey.

However, one wastewater treatment plant in Beit Lahiya, also financed by the World Bank, managed to be completed but a year late, and only after direct intervention by former British prime minister Tony Blair, now envoy of the Middle East Quartet (the U.S., the EU, Russia and the UN).

The shaky and tentative ceasefire was meant to ease the situation somewhat with Israel slowly easing the closure but Israel resealed the borders after a number of rockets were fired at Israel, which in turn followed the assassination of several Islamic resistance fighters in the West Bank.

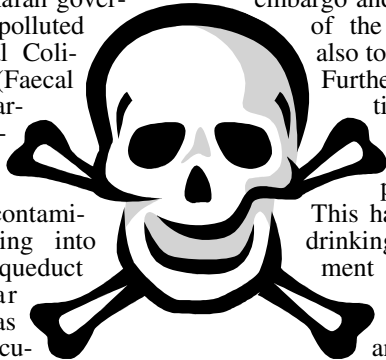
The UN also accused the Israeli Defence Forces of seven ceasefire violations. These include the shooting of two Gazan civilians tending their crops, who the Israelis claim had come too close to the border fence.

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→ Israel sends reduced fuel to Gaza

→ Israeli rights group warns of grave water shortage in West Bank



## The antennas are coming

Marblehead—There's something the government, the telecommunication industry and the corporate media don't want you to know: Invisible things can hurt you.

The invisible things in question are low-level electromagnetic waves emitted by cell phones and cell-phone towers. Three neurosurgeons appearing on Larry King confessed that the danger is such that they never put their cell phones up to their heads, but at least cell-phone use is a matter of choice. The antennas going up at the Jewish Community Center and on the Village Street water tower are another matter. Neighbors, some of whose property line is only 2 feet away, will be involuntarily affected by low-level radiation 24 hours a day. The Veterans Middle School is within a 750-foot radius of the water tower, where six more antennas will soon join those already there. Kids at Hillel and the JCC are the new JCC single antenna's nearest neighbors.

Why don't more people know that low-level, non-heating electromagnetic waves can adversely affect people's health and well-being? One reason is that citizens are prohibited by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 from speaking at public meetings about health effects when cell-phone antennas are proposed for their towns, a law written by lobbyists designed to keep information about health effects from the public.

Another is the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Law of 1999, which gave cell phone companies total immunity from product liability. Unlike cigarettes, you will not read in your newspaper about any high-profile lawsuits claiming cell-phone use causes brain tumors or cancer. By law, there can be no lawsuits.

A third reason we hear so little about health effects is that following the passage of the Telecommunications Act, the government stopped funding independent research on health effects from cell-phone radiation. University studies in progress in the U.S. were shut down, and this highly profitable industry became the only one investigating itself. The corporate press refrains from reporting the bad news uncovered by foreign research.

I know that last point is true from personal experience. When I wrote a weekly column for the Boston Globe, I pointed out that the government of Great Britain was warning parents against giving cell phones to children because their brains are more vulnerable to harm due to thinner skulls and rapidly growing grey matter. The column was never printed; it was deemed outside my "area of expertise."

"I don't even have an area of expertise," I told my editor. "How can I be outside it?"

"Linda," he said, as if I were a child. "Look at the advertising."

I looked. And saw page after page of advertising for

cell phones, especially family cell-phone plans.

There's total agreement in the scientific community that exposure to low-intensity radio frequency waves in the microwave portion of the electromagnetic spectrum causes biological changes in living things. Research in Finland, the UK, France, Australia and Japan indicates that those cellular changes can lead to short-term physical ailments such as chronic fatigue syndrome, insomnia, headaches and memory disturbance, as well as long-term weakening of the immune system and the protective blood-brain barrier, eventually leading to brain tumors and cancer. The American Cancer Society and other groups dependant on corporate funding are waiting for definitive proof that will never come. With so many poisons in our environment (each one of us has traces of hundreds of toxins in our blood stream), science will never be able to pinpoint exactly which one has finally caused our illness.

Why is this invisible threat an issue in town now? For a total fee of \$2,000 a month, the Water Board solicited telecommunications companies to look into siting new antennas in town. The Board of Selectmen signed a lease with MetroPCS in January, then waited four months to inform neighbors on Village Street, as required by law, that new antennas would be going up. Six weeks later, the Planning Board ap-

proved a special permit, encouraging other companies to follow suit. This scenario — monetary rewards, neighbors taken by surprise, federal limits on local authority, an uninformed citizenry and compliant boards — plays out in town after town across the United States, orchestrated by highly paid corporate strategists. Oh, and agreements once reached cannot be rescinded.

Town Planner Rebecca Curran and a group of volunteer citizens will soon be working on a new by-law to regulate the further proliferation of antennas in Marblehead, which hopefully can be presented at next year's Town Meeting. The principle of prudent avoidance, which has led New Zealand and Scotland to prohibit antennas on school grounds, should lead us to limit the number of antennas situated here. We already have sufficient coverage for town-wide cell-phone use.

We need not add more threats to our environment if we are half as determined to protect our health as the telecommunications industry is to keep us believing that we needn't bother our pretty little heads about invisible things.

Linda Weltner is a Marblehead resident.

## Israelis Suggest Palestinian Language Be Killed

**Poll: 77% of Israeli Arabs would rather live in Israel than in any other country in the world**

By Bradley Burston, Haaretz Correspondent  
Tags: Harvard, Israeli Arabs, poll

A recent opinion poll conducted by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government found that 77 percent of Israeli Arabs would rather live in Israel than in any other country in the world.

The survey of 1,721 Israelis, both Arab and Jewish, also showed that 73 percent of the Jews and 94 percent of the Arabs want Israel to "be a society in which Arab and Jewish citizens have mutual respect and equal opportunities."

The Kennedy School said in a statement that the poll produced a number of results it termed surprising, pointing to a higher level of co-existence than might have been anticipated.

The research comes at a period of simmering tensions in some sectors of the Arab-Jewish divide within Israel.

The release of the poll coincided with celebrations, accompanied by widespread Israeli Arab boycotts, of the 60th anniversary of the state's declaration of independence.

**Israeli Arab MKs cited widespread discrimination (racism) as the cause of the boycotts. At the same time, MK Limor Livnat (Likud) proposed that the Knesset remove Arabic from its list of the country's official primary languages.**

However, Professor Todd Pittinsky, research director of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership and lead researcher for the poll, said that the results

**pointed to a contrary phenomenon. Much media coverage focuses on the divisions between Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel, and not enough on the sincere and concerted efforts to coexist peacefully, Pittinsky said in a statement.**

According to the poll, 68% of Jewish citizens support teaching conversational Arabic in Jewish schools to help bring Arab and Jewish citizens together.

The data also showed that more than two-thirds of Israeli Jews (69 percent) said they believed that contributing to co-existence was a personal responsibility.

"Every day, innovative experiments in co-existence are going on," Pittinsky said.

"People on the ground in Israel are running community centers that enable cultural exchanges; in bilingual schools like the Hand in Hand network of schools - young Jewish and Arab children become culturally conversant

with each other. These deserve as much attention as rockets and roadblocks. They should be nurtured, studied, funded, and reported in the media. Ultimately the most successful efforts should be launched on a wider scale."

The study, conducted in Hebrew and Arabic with the assistance of University of Haifa researchers, was funded by the Alan B. Slifka foundation, which has sponsored a number of coexistence projects.

**"This report supports what we have long suspected: unity among Israel's Jewish and Arab communities is not only attainable, but there is great public support for it," philanthropist Slifka said.**

"The critical next step is for Israeli policy makers to bring about the structural changes that the Jewish and Arab publics support, to reshape the educational, income, residential, and other divides that undermine national unity."