

# Communities issue run water advisories

By LINDA GALLAGHER

BELLAIRE-It's been a cold winter.

Colder than it's been in many years, apparently. Because Ken Stead, who has served as Bellaire's DPW supervisor since 1991, employed by the village since 1976, had a hard time remembering the last time Bellaire was forced to ask residents and businesses to keep their water faucets running to prevent water lines from freezing.

Bellaire, followed closely by the neighboring villages of Central Lake, Ellsworth and Mancelona, issued "run water" advisories early last week. Everyone on village water is being asked to keep a slow trickle of cold water running from one faucet in the building 24 hours a day until further notice, usually late March or early April after frost laws are lifted from the roads.

"Geeze, I'd say it's been at least 10 years, maybe 15, since

Bellaire had to keep the water running," said Stead, who said that some residents on dead-end streets in the village, where water lines also dead-end, had been under an advisory for the past two weeks or so. "I can't really remember the last time we had to do this."

Municipal water systems are in danger of freezing, the supervisor explained, when winter frost levels are packed deep into the ground during extremely cold periods of weather. "Since most water lines are under the roads, and the snow is removed from those roads, the water lines don't have the protection of an insulating layer of snow," he said. "Every car that drives down that road pushes that frost level deeper. So do cold, sunny days, which we've seen more and more of lately."

Stead estimated current Antrim County frost levels at ap-

## Water

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proximately four feet, a foot or less away from water system lines, buried four to five feet deep in most municipalities.

Thankfully, the DPW supervisor doesn't ever recall Bellaire's water system actually freezing. "We have two big underground storage tanks, one which holds

50,000 gallons of water, the other 100,000 gallons of water," he said. "It's communities with water towers and other above ground water tanks that usually risk having frozen water lines during cold winters."

He does remember, however, when northern Michigan municipalities like St. Ignace went without use of city water for several months after their water lines froze during one memorable winter in the early 90's when frost levels were estimated as deep as seven feet.

Very important, he added, was that water use be kept to a minimum, despite the advisory. "Don't run that water at full blast," he warned. "If a lot of people do that, our sewer lagoon will fill up and the village will face extra charges to have it pumped."

Customers will not be charged for the additional use of water, said officials in all four communities. Instead, bills will be estimated based on the customer's average annual use.

Although, as of mid-week last week, Elk Rapids' water system appeared to be in good shape, Village DPW superintendent Ron Ridge said he was keeping a close eye on the situation. "We're popping a manhole cover tomorrow and putting a 'sewer cam' down there to see how deep the frost level is," Ridge said. "Hopefully, we're ok."

Along with Bellaire, Central Lake, Ellsworth, and Mancelona, run water advisories have also been issued recently for more than two dozen other communities in northern lower Michigan.