

By: Anne Sanderson

Residents of Rama continue to break ground as the first Canadian citizens to participate in an odor-testing program that could be used as a model across the country. On Wednesday, April 16 about 20 people took part in a training session which will prepare them for a 12-month testing session aimed at analyzing the level of odor that is being emitted from the hog barns in that community.

The tests are being sponsored by the Spirit Creek Watershed Committee (SCWC), which serves as a public watchdog for the Rama hog barn operations. Although this is phase two of the odor testing program, this step is receiving country-wide recognition as the first study to combine data submitted by the residents with scientific information based on accurate dispersion models.

The models were developed at the University of Saskatchewan by Saskatchewan researcher, Huiqing Guo. Guo's team has developed a formula to analyze odor distribution, frequency, intensity, duration and offensiveness and document how much and how often odor is actually being emitted from the barns.

Wednesday's training session was a good example of the detailed process of using human noses as scientific instruments. Most of the time was spent training the participants how to measure their sense of smell. This will help to increase the accuracy of the smell tests done throughout the year, as everyone will be using the same baseline to record the level of odor coming from the barns.

In an interview on Thursday, April 17, SCWMC Chairman Don Walters told The News that residents were given different dilutions of a non-poisonous chemical solution used in paint. They were then required to rate the sample from 1 to 10 for intensity and test their own accuracy by checking their answer against the number on the

bottom of the bottle. The exercise, which is called "calibrating their noses" helps to get everyone on the same wavelength when it comes to odor intensity. Walters said that during phase one of the project, which was conducted this past year it was amazing how well the participants caught on to the system. Many of the results showing very close comparisons.

Color hues were also used to demonstrate intensity. In much the same fashion as the smell-testing residents were asked to guess the strength of the hue and then determine how close they were, by checking the correct answers on the back of the color sample.

Residents will be required to record the intensity, duration, character, date and time of odor occurrences. The information will be recorded on forms which will be collected at the end of the testing period which is slated for April, 2004.

The information provided by the residents will be used in conjunction with other scientific data being collected during the same time-period. Filters will be used to take odor samples from the exhaust fans at the hog barns and the lagoons, which will then be sent away for scientific analysis.

The committee also plans to hire two "nasal rangers" to drive around and assess the odor from the barns during a 20-week interval. As the tests will be taken at varying distances from the barns, the rangers will be required to wear masks to ensure that the calibration of their nose is not affected by fresh air between locations.

Walters said that SCWMC will be contacting other eligible residents this week. He said that at least 15 additional people are needed to give an overall view of the situation, however it is hoped that many more residents will take an interest.