

# CHAMPIONS FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE

*Ordinary people taking extraordinary action*

## RICK VIGRASS LOVES HIS LAKE

Rick Vigrass has a long history with Katepwa Lake. While attending high school in Regina during the 1960s, he often visited his grandmother at her cottage. Later he spent time at his parents' cottage with his wife and children. After he stopped working as a Professional Petroleum Engineer, he decided to retire to the lake where he also became involved in the community. Rick quickly learned that Katepwa Lake, like all the Qu'Appelle Valley Lakes, is not as healthy as it had been when he spent time there as a child. He decided that he had to do his part to make a difference.

There are many reasons for the lake's declining health, including nutrient run-off from lakeshore development and agriculture, treated sewage from the Regina Discharge Water Treatment Plant and upstream hydrocarbon spills. Contributing to these many problems is also the amount of garbage in the lake, including tires. According to Rick, local anglers' fish finders suggest that there could be as many as 5000 tires at the bottom of the lake, probably dumped there over many years. As a Petroleum Engineer, Rick understands the dangers of these tires in the environment. Modern tires include about 30% real rubber, with the rest made up of fabric, wire, oil, plastic, and various chemicals. Oil and plastic are petrochemicals which leach into the water over time. Some of the chemicals are harmful to aquatic life. In short, tires are not good for lakes.



Rick decided that he could easily do his small part to improve the health of his lake. Since 2021, Rick regularly sets out in his kayak to collect tires and other garbage from the lakeshore. He also shares this work on social media, with over 8000 views in his first year. While awareness of the issue is increasing, progress is slow. Retrieving the tires is hard work. Rick estimates that he has collected an average of 20 tires per year for the last three years – it is progress, but a lot of tires remain.

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Rick also worries that even if all tires were removed, other significant issues remain. For instance, Katepwa still contains chemical residues at elevated levels from the May 2020 oil spill into Wascana Creek. The most concerning of these are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHS), which are toxic to fish and birds, and Benzo(a)Pyrene (BaP), which has links to cancer. Rick worries that without the proper precautions by the City of Regina and the Co-op Refinery, a similar spill could happen again.

The issues at Katepwa Lake, like many lakes in Saskatchewan, are significant, but this will not deter Rick from continuing to do his part – one tire at a time.

*This column is a collaborative project of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society and the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development – RCE Saskatchewan.*



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