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Stay out**Cool blue water could be deadly**By JEAN JONES
Staff Writer**COMMERCIAL TWP**

There is one sure way to avoid drowning in a water-filled, abandoned sand mining pit.

Stay out!

U.S. Silica's Scott Eves, environmental health and safety coordinator, and Reece Horne, of the U.S. Mine Safety

and Health Administration, brought that message to students at the Haleyville-Mauricetown School and Port Norris School this week.

It's a message that may be hard to impress upon children whose friends and families may have swam in those pits for years. The weather is warming and soon people will

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Stay out

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be looking for a place to cool off. Sand mining is an old industry in this area and on a hot day, the cool blue water is mighty inviting, even though almost every one of them knows about the drownings that occur every summer.

"Mines are attractive places with their big ponds, sandy beaches and trails through the woods, but these are not parks," Eves warned.

Swimmers can cramp because of the cold springs that feed the ponds, which sometimes are 50 to 100 feet deep. Heavy equipment operators may not see them, or undercut banks can cave in and drop them into the water.

"This is an industrial activity. It is a mining operation," he emphasized.

Horne asked how many kids drive ATVs. There were a number of raised hands.

"Mining areas look like they would be good recreation but they change from day to day," he said, recounting incidents where a rider went over a hill to find nothing on the other side, or another who jumped a new hill and hit a tree on the other side. "Ask somebody who works there about the hazards," he said.

Trooper Melvin Brisbane had even more bad news for ATV riders.

"Most townships have ordinances now," he said. "If an ATV is unregistered and uninsured, we can confiscate it. It will be forfeited and sold."

Criminal trespass charges also can be filed, he said.

And there can be quicksand. Eves told of an incident where kids tried to walk

across what appeared to be a dried up puddle with a cracked surface. It actually was quicksand and when the largest broke through the crust and started to sink, one of the others ran for help. Fortunately, they got back in time.

They had to dig him out. The suction was so great they couldn't pull him out," Eves said. By the time they got to him, he was up to his shoulders."

Horne said sand pits can have sudden drop offs into deep water and, in some cases, someone might dive in and not come back up.

Port Norris School teacher Paul Milbourne had a first-hand experience with that. He said he was with a group and a girl jumped in and never came up.

"She jumped into the deep portion and we never saw her again. I don't know how deep it was, but once she jumped in, she was gone," he said.

Whether you call it a sand wash, blue hole or mining pit, those places are much more dangerous than most realize. One student said she had a relative that has been swimming in mining pits for 40 years and nothing ever happened. Eves responded that the main thing is not to put yourself in a place where you can get hurt.

"You can go out and run up Route 55 and maybe never get hurt for 40 years — it you're lucky," he said.

The bottom line is, "stay out, stay alive."