



SMALL WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Newsletter # 15

April, 2014

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Looking back over the 10 years that I have been involved with the Small Water Users Association of BC, I am surprised how little most things have really changed. The government has developed (but rarely really implemented) various small water system strategies. The Health Authorities have set water quality standards (objectives? Goals? requirements? guidelines?), but have met with little overall success in enforcing them. The total number of small systems on a boil advisory or water quality advisory remains about the same. Hundreds of millions of dollars in federal/provincial funding has gone towards improvements in water infrastructure for municipalities and regional districts, leaving most other water systems to self-fund necessary infrastructure. Hundreds of small systems still provide untreated or marginally treated surface or ground water to thousands of users in all areas of the province. I have met many people living on such systems and have yet to hear even one complain that they feel particularly at risk (which is not to say they aren't). Furthermore during this period we have (thankfully) had no Walkerton or even a single death that has, to my knowledge, been directly attributed by the BC government to contaminated drinking water.

It all seems at times like pushing water uphill (pardon the pun). Yes, there have been quite a few 'success stories' – small systems that have managed to raise the necessary funds and satisfy the government requirements for safe drinking water -

however in the overall context these are few and far between. It will be interesting to see what the next ten years brings.

Denny Ross-Smith

UPCOMING EVENTS (2014)

British Columbia Water & Waste Association (www.bcwwa.org):

- Small Water Systems Symposium, May 5, Whistler. The symposium program is in Appendix 1. Delegates may also attend the trade show on Sunday & Monday at no additional cost. However we do note that BCWWA has seen fit to significantly increase the cost to attend the SWS Symposium.
- A variety of training courses – see their website for a complete list.

MTS Maintenance Training Services (www.mtsinc.ca)

- Various courses at its training facility in Vernon, including quite a few specific to small water systems. MTS can also assist small systems with a variety of consulting services on such topics as hazard assessments, emergency response plan development, water meter implementation, etc.

SMALL WATER SYSTEM GUIDEBOOK

After a nearly three year wait the Small Water System Guidebook was finally released by the Ministry of Health in December, 2013. We have included a printed copy with this newsletter (courtesy of the Ministry of Health), and you may also access the guidebook in pdf form online at the ministry website – www.health.gov.bc.ca – just type ‘small water system guidebook’ into the search tab.

The original intent was a much more comprehensive guidebook with a large technical section on small system operations. It is possible that a ‘Part II’ of the guidebook will be forthcoming, sometime this millennium.

INTERIOR HEALTH SMALL WATER SYSTEMS STRATEGY

In late 2013 Interior Health began work to develop a new strategy for small water systems. As part of this effort they invited small systems to provide input (a novel idea – perhaps long overdue!). I don’t know how many responses they received, or what the final ‘strategy’ will look like. However we were copied on two of the responses – one from the Regional District of Central Kootenay and one from Fife Water Users Community (~20 connections) in Christina Lake. Both of their letters were well-written and insightful, and we have included them in Appendices 3 and 4. We would be interested in your own comments on this subject, but more importantly if you are within Interior Health’s jurisdiction and haven’t already responded to their request we would urge you to do so.

Interior health has also just recently finalized their large system strategy. It might interest some of you to know that it is not only small systems that are struggling to comply with water quality expectations. According to an IHA spokesperson, only 24% of their large systems on surface water meet their treatment objectives. There are 54 large

systems without filtration, 56 (out of 84) do not adequately treat for Crypto & Giardia, and 10 do not adequately remove viruses.

UBCM – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING KEY SMALL WATER SYSTEM CHALLENGES

Last August the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) released a series of recommendations to government regarding small water systems. Their complete report may be seen in Appendix 2, and we would highly recommend that you read it in full since, if their recommendations are adopted by the government, they could have a significant impact on many of you.

The government works in mysterious ways and is not known for rapid decision making (except when salary increases are under consideration), so we are not optimistic that anything will happen very soon. But you never know!

WATER SUSTAINABILITY ACT

The provincial government has at long last introduced Bill 18 – the Water Sustainability Act – which is before the Legislature for first reading. The proposed Act is intended to make improvements in seven areas:

1. Protect stream health and aquatic environments
2. Consider water in land-use decisions
3. Regulate and protect groundwater
4. Regulate water use during times of scarcity
5. Improve security, water-use efficiency and conservation
6. Measure and report large-scale water use
7. Provide for a range of governance approaches

The Act is a very long document with 219 sections, and is written in such a peculiar form of mind-numbing legalese that I defy anybody to read it in full. Here is an example:

“22(2) The rights exercisable under authorizations described in subsection (1) that have precedence from the same date have precedence in accordance with the ranking under subsection (7) of the water use purposes in respect of which the authorizations are issued.”

Well that’s pretty clear! Anyhow, if you do decide to have a look at Bill 18 (just Google ‘water sustainability act’), I would suggest that you read section 22 which refers to water use purposes, and ranks them from highest to lowest in 11 categories. The highest ranked uses, in order, are (1) domestic, (2) waterworks and, (3) irrigation. Based on this, my conclusion is that small water systems have little to worry about as regards the (eventual) provisions of the Act. If any of you disagree please let us know of your concerns.

BOIL WATER NOTICES

According to inspection reports issued by the five regional health authorities, the total number of boil water notices declined by 6% from April 2013 to April 2014 (525 to 495), and the number of water quality advisories by 20% (70 to 56). For those of you who may be interested, the totals by region as of March 2014 were as follows:

<u>Health Authority</u>	<u>Boil Water Notices</u>	<u>Water Quality Advisories</u>
IHA- Kootenays	105	19
IHA – Okanagan	98	12
IHA – Thompson/Cariboo/ Shuswap	179	24
FHA	7	0
VCHA	40	0
NHA	43	1
VIHA	<u>30</u>	<u>0</u>
	495	56

We should note once again that many small systems with zero or inadequate treatment remain unknown to the health authorities or have somehow been overlooked in their reporting. This may perhaps be attributed to the heavy workloads of the health inspectors who may simply lack the time to track down and inspect these ‘off the radar’ small systems.

DRINKING WATER CHLORINATION FACTS

There seems to be a lot of confusion, misperceptions and outright opposition to the use of chlorine to disinfect drinking water. Chlorination remains a contentious subject in many parts of rural BC, and those people holding strong negative opinions are unlikely to be deterred by the facts. Nevertheless in Appendix 5 we have reprinted a brief HealthLink BC publication “Drinking Water Chlorination Facts’ which some may find of interest.

RES’EAU WATERNET

The group of Canadian universities and private companies that comprised Res’Eau WaterNet have now completed the five year, \$5 million federally funded research project aimed at developing ‘robust affordable water treatment technologies for small water systems’. As a former member of their Board of Directors I would like to be able to report that they succeeded in this effort, however nothing I have seen or heard would support this conclusion. Undeterred, however, the Feds have approved a further five years of funding for Res’Eau, with a new Board of Directors. I wish them the best of luck – honestly – because the only other conclusion would be that \$10 million could have gone a long way towards small system infrastructure improvements.

SUATAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE SOCIETY

The Sustainable Infrastructure Society (SIS) is currently offering two new programs that may be of interest to small systems. The first, called Canadian Water Websites, is a website subscription service. With this service a water system can set up its own dedicated website at a moderate cost. A \$50.00 discount off the one time setup fee is being offered until June 15, 2014. You can obtain more information on this service by visiting www.aboutwatersystems.org.

The second program is a Canadian Water Directory: a directory of companies that supply products or services to the water industry. The directory may be viewed by going to their website at www.canadianwater.directory.

NEW AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Our affiliate members include equipment vendors, consulting engineering firms, water test laboratories and reservoir cleaning firms. We appreciate their support for our Association. Each affiliate member has a listing on our website with information about their products or services and we encourage you to take a look at what they have to offer you. You are also welcome to give us a call if you are looking for a particular product or service, since we can usually direct you to the appropriate affiliate member(s) or other companies in your general area.

We would like to welcome the following new affiliate members to our Association:

The Last Drop Water Systems
Gentis Water Company

Quathiaski Cove
Vancouver

☺ *'When the water of a place is bad it is safest to drink none that has not been filtered through either the berry of a grape or else a tub of malt. These are the safest filters yet invented'.*

–Samuel Butler

☺ *Water, taken in moderation, cannot hurt anybody*

-Mark Twain