



SMALL WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

While I have no hard data to rely on, my impression is that the five regional health authorities are making quite a bit of progress towards eliminating long term boil water advisories. They continue to face a difficult challenge, however, because while they are determined to bring both large and small systems up to their 43210 treatment standards, they recognize the obstacles faced by many systems in achieving these objectives – primarily to do with financing the required infrastructure. This conundrum has led them to make frequent (but reluctant) compromises, though not always in a consistent manner. I have come to respect the difficulties faced by drinking water officers in carrying out their duties, and to admire the ones who go out of their way to offer good advice and assistance where they can.

I recently attended a conference on First Nation water systems which was very interesting. Curiously, while the federal government pays nearly all of the costs of new infrastructure, operator training, etc., this leads to many systems being over engineered and consequently difficult to operate and maintain. Overall, it seems, there are just as many issues with drinking water on FN reserves, but more to do with maintenance and operations. Kind of makes you wonder!

The British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) recently abolished their Small Water Systems Committee (which I had served on for the past ten years).

Not sure exactly why, although it may be that the SWS committee had struggled for years to come up with practical initiatives to assist small systems. The annual Small Water Systems Symposium, held in conjunction with the BCWWA annual conference, (see 'upcoming events') has always featured an excellent mix of presentation topics and, although well attended, has rarely attracted more than a handful of small system attendees.

Denny Ross-Smith

UPCOMING EVENTS AND TRAINING COURSES (2016)

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

- Annual Conference & Trade Show, May 1-3, 2016, Whistler. As in previous years there will be a one day Small Water Systems Symposium at a reduced rate, which includes entry to the large suppliers trade show. If you are thinking of attending do not consider the 'special' hotel rates offered through BCWWA since you can obtain even lower off-season rates at most hotels in Whistler.
- BCWWA also offers a number of free webinars and operator training courses – check their website.

MTS Maintenance Training Services (www.mtsinc.ca)

- MTS offers various operator training courses at its 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.

Thompson Rivers University (www.truwater.ca)

- TRU offers a 'WaterSafe' course of basic instruction for owners and operators of small systems, as well as a one year certificate course in water & wastewater utilities.

INTERIOR HEALTH AUTHORITY SMALL WATER TEAM

In our last newsletter we referred to Interior Health's Small Water Team: EHOs dedicated to working with small systems, and we listed the team members. Since then there has been several changes in personnel, and the current team consists of:

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| Rob Birtles | Penticton | 250-770-5540 | robert.birtles@interiorhealth.ca |
| Katie McNamara | Invermere | 250-342-2336 | katherine.mcnamara@interiorhealth.ca |
| Jessy Bhatti | Kamloops | 250-851-7340 | jessy.bhatti@interiorhealth.ca |
| Renee Ansel | Nelson | 250-505-7220 | renee.ansel@interiorhealth.ca |
| Tristan Wilson | Penticton | 250-770-5540 | tristan.wilson@interiorhealth.ca |
| Kim Wrixon | Williams Lake | 250-302-5000 | kim.wrixon@interiorhealth.ca |
| Brian Gregory | Salmon Arm | 250-883-4170 | brian.gregory@interiorhealth.ca |

BCWWA SMALL WATER SYSTEMS PILOT PROJECT

The British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) recently received a \$500,000 grant from the Ministry of Health to deliver a 2 year pilot project to build financial and managerial capacity of small water systems. A key element of the project will be the delivery of workshops in various regions throughout the province to up to 40 invited small system owners/managers. The workshops will address:

- Risk factors that affect source water
- Regulatory compliance and the relationship between treatment alternatives and drinking water quality
- Risk setting principles based on 'full cost pricing' to recover operating and replacement costs
- Planning for finance of infrastructure renewal
- The role and qualification of operators

In addition each of the participating small water systems will receive a day of one-on-one coaching support. A second element of the pilot project will be the development of a framework for the terms and conditions in a Point-of-Entry/Point-of-Use agreement between a water supplier and the home/building owners. BCWWA will also deliver a free webinar series on 'financial best management practices' as well as one on 'regulations and guidelines'.

COMMENT: This project indicates that the BC government recognizes some of the challenges faced by small water systems although it does not address the major challenge: lack of access to government infrastructure financing. We have sent a letter to selected members suggesting that they contact BCWWA if they are interested in participating in the pilot project.

WATER SUSTAINABILITY ACT

In newsletter #15 we commented briefly on the new Water Sustainability Act. BCWWA recently sent a letter to the Minister of Environment containing feedback from their association on the proposed water policies in the Act. The letter is quite lengthy and we decided not to include it as an attachment, however anyone who may be interested should contact BCWWA directly (www.bcwwa.org) and request a copy.

As noted previously, while there may be some implications for well owners, on balance we see little cause for concern with the provisions of the Act for the majority of small water systems.

BC GOVERNMENT – ONLINE DRINKING WATER RESOURCES

Up until recently it was quite easy to locate information pertaining to resources for water systems via the BC Ministry of Health website or several other ministry websites. However in their infinite wisdom – an apparent attempt to 'improve' their websites – they have managed to make it next to impossible now to locate this information. The only way we can find to get there now is to:

- (1) Google 'BC Ministry of Health' or enter 'www2.gov.bc.ca'
- (2) In the upper right question box type in 'air land & water drinking water quality'
- (3) Select the first of the references 'drinking water quality – province of BC'

This will get you to a variety of resources on drinking water systems such as relevant legislation, current water quality advisories, advice for operators, related publications, etc. Good luck!

ISLAND HEALTH MHO SPECIAL REPORT ON DRINKING WATER

Vancouver Island Health Authority's Medical Health Officer issued a report dated Nov. 27, 2014 entitled "Drinking Water in Island Health". It is a comprehensive report which should be of interest to our members on Vancouver Island (Google 'island health mho special report').

We thought that two excerpts from the report might interest some of our members. The first is a basic overview of two common disinfection technologies and an Introduction to filtration, and the second is a description of the enforcement options (specific to the Drinking Water Protection Act/Regulation) available to your drinking water officer (EHO). Both are reprinted in Appendix 1.

BOIL WATER NOTICES AND WATER QUALITY ADVISORIES

It has been our practice to list the current number of boil water notices and water quality advisories throughout BC in our newsletters. It should perhaps be noted that many of these advisories and notices are short term, and that the ones of most concern are the long term advisories (some in excess of 10 years) that usually mean that the water is either untreated or only partially treated. The health authorities have been trying hard to reduce the number of these long term advisories, yet many remain in effect.

For those of you who may be interested, the totals by region as of November 26, were as follows (an astonishing 46% increase in boil water notices since April!:

| <u>Health Authority</u> | <u>Boil Water Notices</u> | <u>Water Quality Advisories</u> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| IHA- Kootenays | 271 | 17 |
| IHA – Okanagan | 110 | 16 |
| IHA – Thompson/Cariboo/ Shuswap | 209 | 19 |
| FHA | 11 | 0 |
| VCHA | 41 | 0 |
| NHA | 55 | 1 |
| VIHA | <u>28</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | 725 | 53 |

CONSTRUCTION PERMITS

Most small water system owners/managers are aware of the requirement to obtain a construction permit from the Public Health Engineer (PHE) before undertaking most types of new work on their system. Sometimes they are unaware of the kinds of work that require a construction permit, and/or when a construction permit is not needed. Also, in some instances the system may hire a consultant or engineering firm that has little or no experience in dealing with the PHE, and who doesn't fully understand what is expected. Often the result is that the construction permit application is initially rejected and has to be re-submitted, driving up costs.

Each of the five regional health authorities has similar, but not exactly identical, guidelines for construction permit applications, and each PHE may have slightly different expectations. Our advice to all of you is to ask the company you are working with if they have had previous experience in submitting construction permit applications in your region. You might also want to ask your PHE if he/she has worked with the firm before.

Appendix 2 lists frequently asked questions regarding water supply system construction permits, as experienced by Interior Health. If you are planning a major construction project I would urge you to meet with the PHE in your region and discuss the project before hiring a firm to prepare an estimate or undertake the work.

WATERBORNE ILLNESSES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Most of you are likely familiar with the more common forms of waterborne bacteria, parasites and viruses, but there are quite a few others lurking out there that you should perhaps be aware of, especially if yours is one of those systems on a long term boil order (i.e. zero or marginal treatment) - see Appendix 3.

WATER PURVEYORS WORKING GROUP

Over the past five years the regional district of Nanaimo (RDN) has sponsored an annual free workshop for small water systems that are not owned and operated by the regional district. They call this initiative the "Water Purveyors Working Group". These one day workshops have had quite similar content to the workshops our own association has put on over the years. RDN considers this service as a sort of 'moral duty' to assist small systems to improve their operations and management.

We feel strongly that this as an excellent model that other regional districts ought to emulate, and to this end we will be encouraging most BC regional districts to follow suit. If interested, you can read about this concept by Googling 'water purveyors working group'.

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

The SWUABC has now been in existence for 12 years and remains the only association in BC exclusively dedicated to serving the interests of small water systems. Our membership has remained pretty steady at roughly 150 small systems, however we rarely ever receive member feedback, apart from comments made during our workshops. Consequently we do our best to guess what might be useful, as you can see by the wide variety of topics in this newsletter.

Some years ago we surveyed our members & asked them to rank a long list of suggested topics in order of importance. The responses helped us to plan workshop topics, and gave us an indication of your interests at that time. This year we would like to try a different approach. We would request that you take the time to think about just the following five questions and email your response to us at smallwaterusers@shaw.ca.

1. What are the top (up to three) issues/challenges currently faced by your water system?
2. If anyone from your system attended any of our 14 past one day workshops, were the workshops worthwhile, i.e. worth the time and cost? (or e.g. did your operator attend just to get the required CEUs?)
3. What is your relationship like with your Environmental Health Officer (Drinking Water Officer), i.e. helpful/unhelpful, friendly/adversarial, etc.? (feel free to elaborate – responses will be kept confidential).
4. What is your approximate annual residential water fee? Has it increased significantly over the past five years?
5. Other than what we have been doing (newsletters, workshops, website, etc.,) what else could an association such as ours do to assist you, if anything?

AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Our 55 affiliate members include equipment vendors, consulting engineering firms, water test laboratories, operator training services, reservoir cleaning & inspection services and others. 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 are also welcome to give us a call if you are looking for a particular product or service, since we can usually save you time by directing you to the appropriate affiliate member(s) or other companies in your general area.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year (hope nobody is offended but I am tired of political correctness- if you don't celebrate Christmas just be merry)