



## SMALL WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last September I was in Victoria to touch base with several of the ministries responsible for drinking water issues. It is a constant challenge to keep up with the frequent changes in government. The Ministry of Healthy Living & Sport had been dissolved, and the staff involved with drinking water transferred (back) to the Ministry of Health (formerly the Ministry of Health Services). They remained in the same offices however, just changed business cards and stationery. The Ministry of Community & Rural Development (formerly the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal & Women's Services, before that the Ministry of Community Services) is now the Ministry of Community, Sport & Cultural Development. The Ministry of Environment wisely decided to keep the same name, but had moved to a new building.

During the past nine months I attended the annual conference of the Water Supply Association of BC in Osoyoos, a Canadian Water & Waste Association conference in Saskatoon, and the British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) small water systems symposium in Penticton. At these various events the primary purpose in attending was the opportunity to talk to equipment vendors, government officials, water system operators and others as a means of keeping up with new developments.

I have submitted a number of articles over the past few years for publication in BCWWA's magazine 'Watermark'. The most recent article, "Are the Expectations Realistic?" from the spring 2011 edition is reproduced at the end of the newsletter.

Denny Ross-Smith  
Executive Director

## UPCOMING EVENTS

★ The Small Water Users Association of BC, in partnership with Interior Health, will be putting on 4 one day workshops this fall. The dates & locations are:

Nelson:	Prestige Lakeside Resort	Friday, Sept. 16
Cranbrook:	Heritage Inn	Monday, Sept. 19
Penticton:	Penticton Lakeside Resort	Tuesday, Oct. 11
Salmon Arm:	Prestige Harbourfront Resort	Thursday, Oct. 13

Additional information and a registration form are available on our website, and members in proximity to the workshop locations will receive an invitation by mail sometime in early August.

## REGIONAL DISTRICT ACQUISITION OF SMALL WATER SYSTEMS

Many, but not all, regional districts are willing to acquire and manage small systems within their boundaries, subject to certain established policies and guidelines. For some small systems facing substantial costs to come into compliance with drinking water quality expectations or simply to maintain their system, a regional district takeover may be the best solution. In most cases, the regional district may be able to obtain substantial grants from a variety of different federal/provincial infrastructure programs, and thus help to offset the costs involved. For example, the Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD) reported recently that improvements made to 8 of their water systems costing a total of \$6,279,000 were offset by \$4,195,000 in grants (67% of the total cost).

As part of their plan to pass on the real costs to the users in order to make these systems more self sustaining and less dependent on regional subsidy, the TNRD will be increasing water fees over the next few years. Cost increases are necessary to cover operation, maintenance, and upgrade costs that are compliant with Interior Health requirements. Small systems (with few connections) tend to have higher costs and larger systems lower costs due to magnitude of scale. To ease the impact of these fee increases, TNRD will cap user fees at \$100 per month for all systems that they currently own. (This cap will not apply to systems that TNRD acquires in the future). The following table illustrates the level of monthly water rates that TNRD system users will be paying over the next several years as subsidies are reduced.

SYSTEM	2011	2012	2013
Black Pines	\$ 70	\$ 85	\$ 100
Blue River	35	37.5	40

Del Oro	\$ 70	\$ 85	\$ 100
Evergreen	100	100	100
Loon Lake	55	60	65
Maple Mission	100	100	100
Pritchard	35	40	45
Savona	35	40	45
Spences Bridge	35	37.5	40
Vavenby (inc. South)	35	37.5	40
Walhachin	97.5	100	100

All 10 systems will also pay an additional annual parcel tax of \$24 (2011), \$48 (2012) and \$72 (2013). While these water rates are unique to the TNRD and are meant simply to be illustrative, they may perhaps give our members a rough idea of the level of rates they might expect from a regional district acquisition. The point being that even with substantial government grants (which are not always guaranteed to be available), users may end up facing significant increases to their water fees. The offsetting factor of course is that all aspects of management, operation, maintenance, liability, etc. become the responsibility of the regional district. We advise any of our members who may be considering the idea of a regional district acquisition to inquire about all aspects of the district's policies and try to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the anticipated costs and other implications.

## IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS: SINKING FUND DEBENTURES

Most improvement districts and regional districts are aware that they may be able to arrange (or have in the past arranged) long term financing through the provincial government in the form of sinking fund debentures. What many may not know is that the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (BCMIC), which provides management services to the government in regards to such financing, recently introduced a minimum annual management fee of \$5,000 on all such debentures. For smaller improvement districts with modest financing requirements, this additional fee may make the cost of such government financing prohibitive. This is a very unwelcome development, particularly considering that improvement districts are ineligible for government infrastructure grants.

## OPERATOR TRAINING COURSES & OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

We continue to get inquiries regarding small water system operator training courses, and the level of operator training required. The drinking water legislation does not require either training or certification for small system operators (systems serving up to 500 people per day). Consequently it is left up to the drinking water officer to determine the required level of training and/or certification. In almost all cases a minimum level of operator training will be required.

There are a variety of operator training courses available in B.C. A good starting point would be to go to the following three websites: (1) [www.bcwwa.org](http://www.bcwwa.org), (2) [www.mtsinc.ca](http://www.mtsinc.ca), (3) [www.truwater.ca](http://www.truwater.ca). If in doubt as to what level of operator training is

required for your system we would suggest that you talk to your drinking water officer/public health inspector.

## BOIL WATER ADVISORIES

According to the websites of the five B.C. health authorities, as of June 9, 2011 there were 517 water systems on a boil advisory. This is up from 206 in 1998 and 338 in 2002. And the number 517 does not tell the full story, since many small systems with inadequate treatment are simply unknown to the health inspectors. While this situation is hardly encouraging, and is unlikely to improve very much in the near term, the challenges faced by both the health authorities (in enforcement) and the water supply systems (in compliance) are formidable.

The Drinking Water Protection Act (DWPA) specifies Draconian penalties for persons who contravene the Act, or a regulation, order or direction under the Act. These penalties (fines of up to \$200,000 per day and imprisonment for up to 12 months) were clearly aimed at large municipal or other systems rather than small systems. Perhaps recognizing this, the government later enacted a series of fines ranging from \$75 to \$575 for a variety of offences under the DWPA, the Water Act, and the Drinking Water Protection Regulation. Drinking water officers are understandably reluctant to issue 'tickets' for such offences, and usually prefer to try to negotiate an acceptable timetable for compliance with systems on a boil water advisory.

A good example of this approach is Interior Health's 'Boil Water Notice Remediation Strategy' which was introduced in late 2010. It involves a 5 year 5 step approach whereby conditions on operating permits require a water system to take certain actions within a specified time period. It remains to be seen how effective this initiative will prove to be.

## SMALL WATER SYSTEM GUIDEBOOK

In early 2011 the Ministry of Health contracted for the preparation of a "Small Drinking Water System Guidebook". We were asked to review the initial draft of this guidebook and noted a number of concerns, particularly with regard to the sections on technology which appeared to be overly complex and confusing for most small systems. However the final version should prove to be a useful document and we will try to make copies available to all our members with the cooperation of the Ministry.

## UBCM PROPOSAL

In December 2010 the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) drafted a "Proposal for Dialogue: New Definition of Small Water Systems and Risk Management Approach to Small Water System Issues". The document can be viewed on the UBCM website at [www.ubcm.ca](http://www.ubcm.ca) (you have to use the search box). The document introduces some new concepts, for example a definition of a 'micro system' (2-25 connections), which would be exempt from the DWPA requirements.

Several government ministries are involved in reviewing the UBCM paper, however it is unclear at the time of writing where this is all heading. Certainly there may

be some merit in treating micro systems (whatever the final size definition) differently from other systems under the current drinking water legislation.

## NEW AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Our affiliate members include equipment vendors, consulting engineering firms, and water test laboratories. We appreciate their support for our Association. Each affiliate member has a listing on our website with information about their products or services. We would like to welcome the following new affiliate members to our Association:

Jameson Water Services	Victoria
Okanagan Small Water Systems	West Kelowna
Star Pipe Products Canada	Vancouver
Tritech Industries Ltd.	Langley

## ITEMS FOR SALE

(1) The Belcarra Water Users Society will be decommissioned in about one year, when they join their municipal system. They will have a number of items to sell including submersible pumps, timer mechanisms, concrete meter boxes c/w steel covers,  $\frac{3}{4}$  & 1 inch Invensys meters, an Invensys remote meter reader, 6 inch cast iron valve boxes c/w covers, test kits, a hydrant wrench, a 4 ft curb stop key (wrench), a 45,000 litre (2.8 m. diam. X 8.4 m. long) aluminum storage tank, an assortment of various brass and other fittings and a 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Small Water System Operation & Maintenance field study training manual prepared by California State University.

Anyone with an interest in acquiring any of these items should contact Don Reid at 604-939-2339, or be email to [djwreid@shaw.ca](mailto:djwreid@shaw.ca).

(2) The Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) has surplus equipment for sale from 2 pump houses being decommissioned, including: 2-3 phase 208 volt 15 hp vertical turbine intake pumps; 1-3 phase 208 volt 10 hp vertical turbine intake pump; panel, wire starters and breakers to go with the intake pumps; 2-25 hp centrifugal pumps 3 phase 230/460 volt; 2-30 hp centrifugal pumps 3 phase 230/460 volt; assorted electrical, piping & metering equipment.

If interested, please contact Jim Maletta at 250-489-2791 or by email to [jmaletta@rdek.bc.ca](mailto:jmaletta@rdek.bc.ca) for more details.

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*“Ever wonder about those people who spend \$2 apiece on those little bottles of Evian water? Try spelling Evian backward.”*

-George Carlin

*“Once during Prohibition I was forced to live for days on nothing but food and water.”*

-W. C. Fields

