



## SMALL WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last fall we delivered four one day workshops, in Nelson, Cranbrook, Penticton and Salmon Arm. A total of 240 people registered for the workshops, representing some 104 water systems. We would like to thank Interior Health for their support in helping to promote the workshops, providing some of the speakers, and allowing many of their Health Inspectors to attend and participate in the group discussions.

Since our last newsletter in June 2011, I attended a conference "Big Value in Small Systems" in Vancouver, presented by RES'EAU WaterNet. The conference featured reports on a number of new water treatment technologies under development at various universities across Canada. While there I also participated in a Board of Directors meeting of RES'EAU WaterNet. In the Fall I attended a conference in Salmon Arm put on by the Water Supply Association of BC (WSABC). While the members of WSABC are mostly very large Improvement Districts in the Okanagan, they often face many of the same issues as our members, such as financing, management, etc.

I continue to participate in the monthly teleconference meetings of the Small Water Systems Committee of the British Columbia Water & Waste Association

(BCWWA). The committee plays an active role in planning the small water system symposium at each year's annual conference (see 'Upcoming Events' and attachment).

Newer members of our Association might be interested in knowing that our membership currently stands at 161 water systems ranging in size from 1 to 350 connections, plus 50 affiliate members (equipment vendors, engineering companies, water test laboratories, and water treatment consultants. As always, we welcome your advice, enquiries, and suggestions as to how we may better serve your interests.

Denny Ross-Smith  
Executive Director

## UPCOMING EVENTS (2012)

### BC Groundwater Association ([www.bcgwa.org](http://www.bcgwa.org))

- 2012 Convention, Tradeshow & AGM, March 26-28, Kamloops

### Water Supply Association of BC ([www.wsabc.ca](http://www.wsabc.ca))

- Spring Workshop, March 29-30, Kelowna

### Environmental Services Association of Alberta ([www.esaa.com](http://www.esaa.com))

- Water Technologies Symposium (WATERTECH 3012), April 11-13, Banff

### British Columbia Water & Waste Association ([www.bcwwa.org](http://www.bcwwa.org)):

- 2012 Annual Conference & Tradeshow, April 21-25, Penticton (special 1½ day program for small systems – see enclosure)
- SWS operator courses March 19-20, Kamloops, May 14-15 Vancouver
- BCWWA also offers a new online SWS operator course – contact them for details

### Coastal Water Suppliers Association ([www.cwsa.net](http://www.cwsa.net))

- 2012 AGM, Conference & Trade Show, June 1-2, Parksville

### Western Canada Water ([www.wcwwa.ca](http://www.wcwwa.ca))

- WCW'12 Conference & Exhibition ('Water – Treat it Right'), September 18-21, Winnipeg

### Canadian Water & Waste Association ([www.cwwa.ca](http://www.cwwa.ca))

- 15<sup>th</sup> Canadian National Conference & 6<sup>th</sup> Policy Forum on Drinking Water, October 22-24, Kelowna

### MTS Maintenance Training Services ([www.mtsinc.ca](http://www.mtsinc.ca))

- MTS offers a wide variety of operator training courses at its facility in Vernon

## BEST MUNICIPAL WATER IN THE WORLD

The city of Greenwood, BC (pop. 676) recently won an award for having the best tasting water in the world at the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual International Water Tasting Competition held in Berkely Springs, West Virginia. A panel of judges rated over 100 water samples from all over the world, awarding points for appearance, odour, flavor, mouth feel, aftertaste and overall impressions. Greenwood scored 40 out of a possible 44 points.

While we join many others in congratulating Greenwood, it is not without a certain sense of irony that we quote Greenwood Mayor Nipper Kettle: “Fortunately here in Greenwood we don’t have to chlorinate our water or do anything with it... You just know it’s fresh because it hasn’t been treated with anything... Nearby Grand Forks used to have good water until they began to chlorinate their supply.”

## EDITORIAL

As our Association enters its ninth year of operation, a constant theme is apparent: the ongoing refusal by the BC government to extend infrastructure financing beyond local government. During the same period millions of taxpayer dollars were funneled to BC municipalities and regional districts to be used to improve and upgrade their drinking water systems. I am personally not in favour of government grants at all, since they contradict the notion of ‘user pay’. However if grants are to be given out, then the government should at least ensure a level playing field and extend such grants to all water systems except private utilities administered by the Comptroller of Water Rights.

It seems clear to this writer that, where the health of BC residents is concerned, government priorities lie elsewhere. Perhaps there is some justification for this if one considers other health issues such as the extended waiting times for major surgery in some hospitals. Fortunately no deaths in BC have been directly attributed to the effects of untreated or inadequately treated drinking water. Clearly, though, many people have become quite ill from various water-borne pathogens (although frequently they may not be aware of the source of their illness).

My personal sense is that there is a high degree of complacency about the current situation within government, considerable frustration on the part of health inspectors at their lack of progress in eliminating boil advisories, and, all too often, a public attitude (at least in rural areas) that the risks are extremely low and that they would prefer to be left alone to manage their water systems as they see fit. Providing that BC does not have a Walkerton type incident (which, as in Ontario, would trigger substantial government assistance measures), the current situation in most parts of BC is likely to remain substantially unchanged for many years to come. Only time will tell if this *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of government will be justified.

## BOIL WATER ADVISORIES

In our June 2011 newsletter we reported that there were 517 BC water systems on a boil advisory, up from 206 in 1998 and 338 in 2002. As of March 1, 2012 there has been a further increase, to 527 – somewhat surprising in view of the 2008 BC

Ombudsman's report urging the health authorities to substantially reduce the number of long term boil advisories. While one possible explanation is that the health officers are more diligent in visiting and assessing small systems, and locating some that were previously unknown, the trend is hardly encouraging.

Although we know that while the residents on some small systems actively oppose treatment (in effect refuse to comply with the current drinking water legislation), the real issue, as always, is financing.

## SMALL WATER SYSTEM GUIDEBOOK

In early 2011 the Ministry of Health contracted for the preparation of a comprehensive "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 very useful document and we will endeavour to make copies available to all our members with the cooperation of the Ministry.

NB: Those people who attended our workshops last fall were promised a copy of the guidebook. We have not forgotten, and will do our best to see that you receive your copy as soon as the guidebook is released.

## UBCM PROPOSAL STATUS

In our last newsletter (#11) we mentioned that the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) was considering some new ways of defining small water systems. Several government ministries are involved with UBCM's Small Water Systems Working Group, and we have been awaiting further developments. However, UBCM has had no further meetings since last September, so there is nothing new to report. We will keep our members advised of any developments.

## RD NANAIMO WATER PURVEYORS WORKING GROUP

Last year the Regional District of Nanaimo formed a Water Purveyors Working Group in order to assist small water systems within their jurisdiction in networking and educational activities, to provide an opportunity to meet other owners and operators and to share ideas. If interested you may obtain more information from their website at [www.rdn.bc.ca/cms.asp?wpID=2323](http://www.rdn.bc.ca/cms.asp?wpID=2323), or by contacting Christina Metherall at [cmetherall@rdn.bc.ca](mailto:cmetherall@rdn.bc.ca).

While we do not know how effective this initiative has been, it is an idea that we would recommend all Regional Districts consider as a public service to the small systems within their boundaries.

## BC MINISTRIES UPDATE

### Ministry of Health (MoH):

- The MoH is preparing a Financial Best Management Practices (BMP) Guide for drinking water systems. Similar guides are readily accessible on the Internet.
- Another initiative currently under development by the MoH is a “Water System Safety & Security Assessment”. It is intended primarily for use by health inspectors, i.e. to undertake a risk assessment of your water system prior to determining what, if any, conditions to place on your operating permit. However the assessment could be helpful for a small system to complete on its own initiative, as a means of determining potential risks and trouble spots. We have seen an initial draft, which contains some 133 questions (i.e. it is quite comprehensive).

### Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations (MoFLNRO):

- The regulation of water utilities, formerly under the Ministry of Environment has been moved to the Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations (same telephone numbers and cast of characters).
- The MoFLNRO is close to completion of a new set of Design Guidelines for Rural Community Water Systems. We are told that the new guidelines are expected to be a significant rework of the previous guidelines, and will address all aspects of a small water system. (Please note that these guidelines will only apply to water utilities, i.e. those systems administered by the Comptroller of Water Rights).

## IHA POE/POU GUIDELINES

In February 2012 Interior Health issued a two page brochure entitled: “Point-of-Entry & Point-of-Use (POE/POU) – Treatment Options for Small Systems” (see enclosure). Even if your water system is not within Interior Health’s jurisdiction you may find the brochure of interest. The other four health authorities may have slightly different POE/POU guidelines but we would be surprised if there are any major differences.

It is encouraging to see that a small number of POE systems have been approved within BC and are in operation. Under the right circumstances POE can be a more affordable solution than central treatment. However it is essential that any water

system considering POE first determine the expectations (read 'requirements') of their local health authority and plan accordingly.

## SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE SOCIETY

The Sustainable Infrastructure Society (SIS), a non-profit organization set up to help community water supply systems to access affordable resources, has created a range of programs and tools to help WSS to operate effectively. The following is a brief description of some of these resources.

Insurance for Water Supply Systems: A few years ago SIS introduced an affordable Commercial General Liability insurance package for water supply systems in conjunction with Industry Partners: Aon Reed Stenhouse and Capri Insurance. The program is widely used by water systems throughout BC. SIS also offers Property Insurance, Directors & Officers Insurance, and Boiler & Machinery insurance for water suppliers.

Access to Loans: Many water supply systems need to upgrade their infrastructure. Often they do not have enough money in their reserve fund, and they may find it difficult to obtain funding from a lending institution. SIS is currently working with a BC credit union on several pilot projects which will enable water suppliers to borrow money for upgrading, and would like to hear from water supply systems that are looking for financing.

Asset Management & Rate Setting: The deterioration of infrastructure is a problem for many water supply systems. An asset management plan allows you to systematically manage assets, and schedule replacement or rehabilitation before it becomes a problem. The schedule in turn enables you to predict financing needs well into the future, and that in turn tells you how much you need to charge for water. SIS has Industry Partners who can help you with asset management and rate setting.

Point of Entry Water Treatment: If you are considering Point of Entry (POE) instead of central treatment, SIS can assist you to plan for and procure a POE treatment system.

For more information on these and other resources please contact the Sustainable Infrastructure Society: [www.WaterBC.ca](http://www.WaterBC.ca), Email: [Info@WaterBC.ca](mailto:Info@WaterBC.ca), Tel: 250 472 8660

## A COMMENTARY ON BC'S DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION

Shortly after the Walkerton tragedy the then Minister of Health, Colin Hanson, declared that every citizen of BC was entitled to legislated safe drinking water, except those who lived on a water system serving a single family residence. With the introduction of the new Drinking Water Protection Act and Regulation, we were told that we would have several new responsibilities under the Act and the tolerance shown to non-complying systems in the past would no longer be afforded to systems in the future. We were also told that we would have to have certified operators in place by January 1, 2005, subsequently extended to January 1, 2006 and subsequently amended to be at the discretion of the Drinking Water Officer "(DWO)". Maybe someone told Victoria that

a large number of small water systems (SWS) really didn't have any operations so why was there a requirement for a certified operator when there was nothing to operate? This ongoing change in timing and requirements is indicative of legislation that was poorly drafted and not clearly thought out in terms of how it was going to be applied in the real world. I call this the "one size shoe fits all approach". There is a huge variety of types of water systems within BC; from Metro Vancouver right down to the Mule Creek Campground in Manning Park, with everything else in between. It is not surprising that progress has been painfully slow.

At the outset, there were lots of reference to the unique challenges faced by SWS and in particular the micro SWS. Although there was some minor relaxation in the rules, the only real modification has been in extending the time frame in which a SWS is required to comply with the legislation. However, the current bottom line is that the Mule Creek Campground will be expected to meet the same 43210 standard as the City of Kamloops. Does this make sense?

In BC there is a disconnect between the Ministry of Health, responsible for writing the legislation, and the five Health Authorities who have the challenging task to enforce the legislation along with the drinking water officers (DWO's) who have to deal with the challenges/objections raised by the SWS. The situation was made more complicated in 2010 when the Ombudsman issued her report on drinking water which suggested that the number of BC water systems on a permanent Boil Water Notice (BWN) was unacceptable. This increased the pressure on the Health Authorities to eliminate long term BWN's. **HOWEVER, WAS THIS GOOD PUBLIC POLICY?** I say no. The government has always advanced the "one shoe fits all approach", however, because of the wide diversity of SWS within BC, this approach has not worked and will not work.

Most intelligent people would support a risk management approach. From my perspective, if you are serving the general public, there is an expectation of potable water. However, if you are a summer use, part-time private user group, do you really need big brother ordering you to spend \$100,000 to treat your water when you have 6 consumers? The needs of recreation property owners are far different than those living in a domestic setting where most people expect potable water. The risk associated with each SWS is unique and is dependent upon a multitude of factors. There has been lots of talk over the last nine years but there has not been much progress and the time has come for the government to accept the fact that the one size fits all approach will not work. The time has come to assess risk on an individual system by system basis.

I pose the following five questions:

- i) Why is BC's definition of water systems subject to legislation, the most all encompassing of any province in Canada?
- ii) Why is not a proper risk assessment approach being taken to all of the small water systems in BC, in order to eliminate low risk situations from the legislation?
- iii) Should it not be possible for a Health Authority and a small water system to sign off so that the users of the water accept responsibility for the safety of their water?
- iv) Is not some treatment better than demanding a 43210 standard?
- v) Is there any reason why, in certain circumstances, a permanent BWN is not sound public policy?

Gary McDonnell  
SWUABC Director

## 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.

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

Star Pipe Products Canada, Vancouver  
HomePlus Products Inc., Community Water Division, Kamloops  
Tri City Pumps & Power (2007) Ltd., South Slocan  
Inland Divers Underwater Services, Kelowna  
Gumpton Inc., Cranbrook  
H2O Logics Inc., Sherwood Park, Alberta

## ITEMS FOR SALE

The Belcarra Water Users Society has a number of items to sell including submersible pumps, timer mechanisms, concrete meter boxes c/w steel covers, ¾ & 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 by email to [djwreid@shaw.ca](mailto:djwreid@shaw.ca).

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*“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 most reliable filters yet invented”.*

*-Samuel Butler*

*“With respect to water, Canadians and Americans suffer from the same disease: we say that it is priceless, but act as if it were absurdly cheap”.*

*-editorial, Toronto Globe & Mail*