



## SMALL WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In 2008 the responsibility for drinking water legislation passed from the Ministry of Health Services (formerly the Ministry of Health) to the newly created Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport. In the past, staff at the Ministry of Health had always been available to talk by telephone or to meet with us to discuss matters of interest to our association members. They also sought input from a variety of outside sources (including our association), when examining policy options for small water systems. We are hopeful that we will be able to establish a similar relationship with the staff at the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport.

It should be noted that the provincial Health Authorities and the Ministry of Environment's Water Stewardship Division have been very cooperative, particularly with regard to the planning and delivery of our workshops. That aside, it continues to concern me how little tangible support all levels of government have provided to most small water systems. Improvement Districts appear to be the stepchild of local government and continue to be denied access to infrastructure grants. Private water systems — water users' communities, private societies, resorts, mobile home parks, etc. — are left to plan and finance their drinking water systems with minimal advice and no financial assistance. And yet, as you will see further on, the B.C. Ombudsman is urging the Health Authorities to "utilize the full range of enforcement options available to them to bring water systems into compliance with the Drinking Water protection Act and Regulation." Enforcement rather than assistance seems to be the present rule of thumb.

#### Recent activities/events:

- September 2008:
- Small water systems workshop in 108 Mile Ranch
- October 2008:
- Small water system workshops in Duncan, Campbell River, and Abbotsford.
  - Gave a presentation at the Canadian Water & Waste Association's 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian National Conference & 4<sup>th</sup> Policy Forum on Drinking Water in Quebec City.

- November 2008:
- Attended a meeting with the new Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport in Victoria.
  - Gave a presentation at the British Columbia Fishing Resorts & Outfitters Association (BCFROA) conference in 108 Mile Ranch.
  - Attended a Board of Directors meeting in Vancouver of NSERC Res'eau WaterNet, a \$5.2 million, five year strategic network project to develop cost effective water treatment technologies for small water systems.
- March 2009:
- Attended the British Columbia Ground Water Association's annual conference and trade show in Penticton

## SMALL WATER SYSTEM OPERATOR TRAINING & CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Following changes to the Drinking Water Protection Regulation in 2005 there has been considerable confusion regarding the requirements for a small system with regard to both operator training and certification. The following is an attempt to clarify this situation for our members:

### TRAINING:

There is nothing in the Drinking Water Protection Act or the Regulation requiring training for a small water system operator. However the regional Health Authorities can require an operator to take some form of training via an order on the operating permit. It is up to your Public Health Inspector (Drinking Water Officer) to determine the level of training required, depending on the complexity of your system, the quality of the inlet water, etc. For example, Vancouver Island Health requires the Watersafe course from Thompson Rivers University, or equivalent, as the minimum level of training for a small water supply system.

### CERTIFICATION:

Prior to 2005 all operators of prescribed systems were required to be certified under the Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP). The level of certification required depended on the facility classification. Under the current regulations a small water system operator does not have to be certified unless so ordered by the Public Health Inspector (Drinking Water Officer). For those small water system operators who are certified, they need to acquire 1.2 continuing education units (CEUs) every two years in order to maintain their certification. Even though operator certification may no longer be required if you are with a small system, we strongly recommend that you do maintain your certification.

## OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT

In June, 2008, the B.C. Ombudsman issued a lengthy report entitled: "Fit to Drink: Challenges in Providing Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia." The report makes quite interesting reading and may be accessed at their website [www.ombud.gov.bc.ca](http://www.ombud.gov.bc.ca). Hard copies of the Report can be obtained by contacting the Ombudsman office via email or toll free at 1-800-567-3247.

The following are a few of the Ombudsman's recommendations which may be of particular interest to our members:

R16: *"The regional health authorities commit to reducing by 10 per cent a year the current number of systems on advisories within their regions, and having no system on an advisory for more than 18 months by the end of 2011-12 fiscal year."*\*

\* *"...subject to the Ministry of Health providing the necessary tools and support."*

R27: *"The regional health authorities utilize the full range of enforcement options available to them to bring water systems into compliance with the Drinking Water Protection Act and Regulation."*

R23: *"The regional health authorities have written and publicly accessible inspection goals."*

R25: *"The regional health authorities enforce the requirement for water suppliers to have emergency response and contingency plans..."*

R33: *"The Ministry of Health's\* Small Water Systems Working Group develop a coordinated, provincial small systems strategy, report and implementation plan, and report publicly on this by January 1, 2010."*

\* Now presumably the primary responsibility of the new Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport.

The report also noted that according to the Provincial Health Officer there are some 4,360 identified water systems with between 2-300 connections, plus up to another 2,000 systems that have not been identified by the authorities, i.e. a total of some 6300+ water systems in B.C. that are subject to the drinking water legislation!

So what does all this mean? Much will depend on the degree to which the regional Health Authorities and the various ministries take the Ombudsman's recommendations seriously. To date there has been little evidence of this happening but that is no reason for complacency. We would suggest, in particular, that all members on a boil order (particularly a long term order) begin planning to take the steps necessary to have the boil order removed. If any of

you are uncertain as to how to proceed please let us know since we may be able to offer some practical advice. If any of you do not as yet have an emergency response & contingency plan, we can provide you with a template in order to get you started.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

Our Association was formed in 2003 to serve a perceived need for information and assistance to small water systems throughout the province. In the interim we have established a web site, published eight newsletters, delivered 17 workshops, participated on a government advisory panel on small water systems and lobbied the government for financial and other assistance. However this has been done without any long term written plan or strategy. This past fall the Directors were asked to suggest various ideas for a strategic plan, i.e. what should we be doing over the next five years. The following are some of their suggestions, in no particular order:

1. Revamp our web site to make it more informative and professional.
2. Provide a guide to water treatment technology options, and local companies able to assist small systems with technology selection, installation and commissioning.
3. Expand the membership base in order to have more influence with government.
4. Expand our advocacy role with government to request more and better financial and other assistance to small systems.
5. Continue to sponsor moderate cost workshops for small system owners, managers and operators, based on member feedback on topics of interest.

The Small Water Users Association of BC is viable only if it continues to serve the interests of its membership. Accordingly we really need your input. **Please take a few minutes to write, email or telephone us to tell us what you think we should be doing in the next few years to help you better.**

## NEW DRINKING WATER INITIATIVES

Over the past seven months we have been working with the British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) to develop two new initiatives that would benefit small water systems. The following is a brief description of each, and we would welcome any feedback from members indicating whether or not they feel either initiative would be useful to them.

## 1. Circuit Rider Program

A number of U.S. states as well as Indian & Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) offer circuit rider programs. Basically, an experienced operator or engineer is assigned a territory and visits small systems (by appointment) to provide advice and assistance on various operational and other matters. The service is usually free to the water system. These programs have a long history and have been generally very well received.

We suggested that the government sponsor a trial program with one or two circuit riders to begin with. In addition to giving advice on operations, a circuit rider might also be able to offer practical advice to systems on a long term boil order, i.e. how to select appropriate treatment technology and put a plan together to finance and install the necessary upgrades to get off the advisory.

## 2. Mobile Training Unit Program

In Ontario and Newfoundland, the provincial governments fund operator training in remote areas through the use of mobile training units. These are essentially large trailers equipped with classroom facilities and technology demonstration equipment (e.g. water quality laboratory equipment, UV units, chlorination units, etc.). Operators can receive initial training and/or upgrade their skills without having to travel a long distance to take a course.

Both of these ideas were presented to the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport at a meeting in Victoria in November 2008. The BCWWA small water systems committee supports these initiatives, and their Chairman was also present at the meeting, as was the President of the Sustainable Infrastructure Society. The Ministry was asked to indicate if they were interested in either of these ideas, in which case we (jointly) were prepared to develop and present a full proposal with detailed information and cost estimates. To date we have not received a response.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

April 2-3, 2009: Water Supply Association of BC Annual Spring Workshop,  
Ramada Hotel, Kelowna  
Information at [www.wsabc.com](http://www.wsabc.com) or call Cheryl Halla,  
Secretary-Treasurer at 250-809-8548

April 25-29, 2009: BCWWA Annual Conference & Trade Show, Penticton Lakeside Resort & Penticton Conference Centre.

Again this year BCWWA is offering a special low rate of \$125.00 for small water systems. This will entitle you to attend:

Sunday evening:	The manufacturers & suppliers trade show
Monday a.m.:	Small water systems session - 5 technical papers*
Monday noon:	Trade show
Monday afternoon:	Small water system symposium (theme: 'Everything you Need to Know to Get Off a Boil Water Advisory')
Monday evening:	Trade show

For more information and to register please go to the BCWWA web site at [www.bcwwa.org](http://www.bcwwa.org) or call them toll free at 877-433-4389.

\* One of the technical papers will be "Ten Major Challenges for Small Water Systems in British Columbia", presented by your Executive Director

## WORKSHOPS

As of the date of this newsletter we have not decided if the Association will be sponsoring any workshops this year. Much depends on whether or not there is anything new to offer, for example if the government introduces a small water systems strategy, or if the Health Authorities announce any new initiatives directed at small systems.

For operators who need to obtain CEUs to maintain their EOCP certification, the British Columbia Water & Waste Association (BCWWA) will be offering the two day small water system training course, as well as other courses, at various locations around the province. One of our affiliate members, MTS Maintenance Tracking Systems, also offers a variety of hands-on training at their new facility in Vernon. For more information visit the BCWWA website at [www.bcwwa.org](http://www.bcwwa.org) or the MTS website at [www.mtsinc.ca](http://www.mtsinc.ca).

## GROUNDWATER LEGISLATION

Phase 2 of the proposed Groundwater Protection Regulation has been under development by the Ministry of Environment. It is expected that it will go to Cabinet for approval later this year. Enforcement of the current groundwater legislation has been somewhat lax, however this may change in the coming years. We also learned that the government may soon introduce ticketing offences for violations of the Groundwater Protection Regulation.

## NEW AFFILIATE MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following companies as new affiliate members of the Association :

A. J. Pumps, Chilliwack  
Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops  
Highland Consulting Ltd., Nelson  
Grundfos Canada Inc., Surrey  
Ward Engineering & Land Surveying Ltd., Nelson

All members are encouraged to go to the 'suppliers/consultants' link on our website and scroll down the list to view the products and services which each company can offer to your water system.

## TEN RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

A great deal of useful information on drinking water may be found on the Internet if one only knows where to look. Here are 10 websites that we think are particularly helpful :

1. Ministry of Healthy Living & Sport :  
[www.hls.gov.bc.ca/protect/dw\\_index.html](http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/protect/dw_index.html)
2. Ministry of Community Development : [www.cd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/pathfinder-id.htm](http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/pathfinder-id.htm)
3. Ministry of Environment : [www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/water\\_rights/index.html](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/water_rights/index.html)
4. Interior Health Authority : [www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-safety.aspx?id=538](http://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-safety.aspx?id=538)
5. Fraser Health Authority :  
[www.fraserhealth.ca/services/healthprotection/pages/drinkingwater.aspx](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/services/healthprotection/pages/drinkingwater.aspx)
6. British Columbia Water & Waste Association : [www.bcwwa.org](http://www.bcwwa.org) and  
[www.bcwwa.org/committees/smallwatersys/index.php](http://www.bcwwa.org/committees/smallwatersys/index.php)
7. British Columbia Groundwater Association : [www.bcgwa.org](http://www.bcgwa.org)
8. Environmental Operators Certification program : [www.eocp.org](http://www.eocp.org)
9. Sustainable Infrastructure Society : [www.sustainis.org](http://www.sustainis.org)
10. Aquasanitas : [www.aquasanitas.c/links.asp](http://www.aquasanitas.c/links.asp)

## IN MEMORIAM

We are saddened to report the passing away of Kersteen Johnston in Victoria. Last fall Kersteen volunteered to serve as a Director of the Association. Her knowledge of drinking water issues and government operations had proven very helpful in providing advice on new direction for the Association.

## 'WATERMARK' ARTICLE

Several of our members have recently asked what our Association does. The following article which appeared in the Winter 2008/'09 edition of the 'Watermark' may help answer this question for others who may be interested:

*The Small Water Users Association of British Columbia (SWUABC) was established in 2003 as a non profit society under the British Columbia Society Act. The Association's aim is to represent and assist small water supply systems throughout the province, which we do by:*

- *Lobbying the provincial government for equal access to government financing or other assistance measures.*
- *Delivering regional workshops for operators, owners and managers in partnership with the regional Health Authorities.*
- *Publishing newsletters to keep our members informed about changes to the drinking water legislation, upcoming events, liability insurance and similar matters of interest.*
- *Promoting the services of our affiliate members (equipment vendors, consulting engineering firms and water test laboratories) via our website, (with links to their own company websites).*
- *Keeping informed on current issues through participation on the small water systems committee of BCWWA, the Cooperative Committee of Water Associations (CCWA), and through contacts with other water associations in B.C. and across Canada.*

*The 225 water systems that currently belong to the Small Water Users Association of British Columbia include water users' communities, improvement & irrigation districts, regional district systems, water utilities, private societies, mobile home & RV parks, golf clubs, fishing lodges and resorts. They range in size from 1 to over 300 connections.*

*Since its inception, the SWUABC has organized and delivered 17 one day workshops for small water systems. Approximately 800 owners, managers, board members and operators of small systems have attended these workshops. The focus of each workshop is not technical training, but rather water system responsibilities under provincial drinking water and groundwater legislation. To this end, the Health Authorities and the Ministry of Environment have assisted by giving presentations at all of the workshops.*

*Many small water systems in B.C. face challenges with such matters as coping with the drinking water legislation, finding and retaining operators, selecting appropriate treatment technology, obtaining affordable liability insurance, and financing needed infrastructure improvements. These challenges can best be met if all of the water associations in B.C., including BCWWA and SWUABC cooperate to provide advice and assistance to those systems that are struggling to provide safe drinking water to their users.*

*Water systems, equipment suppliers and engineering firms that are interested in knowing more about the Small Water Users Association of British Columbia are invited to visit our website at [www.smallwaterusers.com](http://www.smallwaterusers.com), or to contact us by telephone (250-825-4308) or email ([smallwaterusers@shaw.ca](mailto:smallwaterusers@shaw.ca)).*

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*"I never drink water. I'm afraid it will become habit-forming."  
- W. C. Fields*