

October 18, 2006

ONTARIO'S NEW CLEAN WATER ACT: WHY WE NEED IT, HOW IT WILL WORK

The Clean Water Act (Bill 43) is a major part of the McGuinty government's commitment to ensure that every Ontarian has access to safe drinking water. Protecting water at its source is the first step in making that commitment achievable. By stopping contaminants from getting into sources of drinking water — lakes, rivers and aquifers — we can provide the first line of defense in the protection of our environment and the health of Ontarians.

For the first time, communities will be required to create and carry out a plan to protect the sources of their municipal drinking water supplies. The Clean Water Act will:

- Require local communities to look at the existing and potential threats to their water and set out and implement the actions necessary to reduce or eliminate significant threats.
- Empower communities to take action to prevent threats from becoming significant.
- Require public participation on every local source protection plan. This means everyone in the community gets a chance to contribute to the planning process.
- Require that all plans and actions are based on sound science.

This legislation is designed to promote voluntary initiatives but does require mandatory action where needed. The legislation sets out a basic framework for communities to follow in developing an approach to protecting their water supplies that works for them:

- **Identify and assess risks** to the quality and quantity of drinking water sources and decide which risks are significant and need immediate action, which need monitoring to ensure they do not become significant, or which pose a low or negligible risk.
- **Develop a source protection plan** that sets out how the risks will be addressed. Broad consultation will involve municipalities, conservation authorities, property owners, farmers, industry, businesses, community groups, public health officials, First Nations and the public in coming up with workable, effective solutions.
- **Carry out the plan** through existing land use planning and regulatory requirements or approvals, or voluntary initiatives. Activities that pose a significant risk to drinking water sources may be prohibited or may require a site specific risk management plan. This plan will set out the measures that a property owner will take to ensure the activity is no longer a threat.
- **Stay vigilant** through ongoing monitoring and reporting to measure the effectiveness of the actions taken to protect drinking water sources and ensure they are protected in the future.

Northern municipalities will protect their drinking water supplies through a locally-driven, scoped planning process that focuses on specific drinking water threats in specific areas.

Investing to prepare communities for source protection

The McGuinty government is committed to providing the resources to fund source protection planning costs, including groundwater studies, technical assessments and plan development. The government has committed approximately \$120 million from 2004 to 2008 to support source protection planning. This includes funding to enable municipalities and conservation authorities to undertake technical studies to provide the baseline scientific information needed for source protection planning.

Helping rural Ontario protect drinking water

The act introduces a new financial assistance program for farmers and small rural businesses for activities that reduce threats to drinking water. A panel that includes agricultural, municipal and conservation authority representatives will provide advice on how the drinking water stewardship program should be administered and allocated. Initially, \$7 million will be available in 2007/2008 for early action to protect drinking water.

Protecting Ontario's natural resources

Protecting drinking water sources is an important part of protecting Ontario's natural resources, green spaces and the environment. Source protection planning will give municipalities a tool to help protect drinking water sources that fits together with long-term regional growth plans such as the growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Implementing Walkerton Inquiry recommendations

The Clean Water Act is part of the government's commitment to implement all of the recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry. The legislation directly addresses 12 and supports the implementation of 22 recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry on protecting drinking water at its source made in the Part 2 report.

-30-

Contact information for media:

John Steele (416) 314-6666
Ministry of the Environment

Anne O'Hagan (416) 325-5809
Minister's Office

Contact information for the general public:

416-325-4000 or 1-800-565-4923/ www.ene.gov.on.ca

Disponible en français