

December 12, 2006

ESTABLISHMENT OF SMALL DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS PROGRAM

The McGuinty government is proposing to transfer legislative responsibility for five categories of non-residential and seasonal residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in response to public consultations that indicated a preference for public health units to oversee small drinking-water systems. This proposed transfer is part of the government's commitment to ensure all Ontarians have continued access to safe drinking water.

Proposed amendments to the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA), the Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002 (SDWA) and the Ontario Water Resources Act (OWRA) would establish the legislative framework for a Small Drinking-Water Systems program to be overseen by local health units. Funding will be provided to public health units to hire, equip and train health inspectors to assess these drinking water systems.

Drinking Water System Categories

The categories of drinking water systems being transferred include:

- Large municipal non-residential, such as municipally-owned airports and industrial parks, sports and recreational facilities
- Small municipal non-residential, such as small community centres, libraries, sports and recreational facilities
- Non-municipal seasonal residential, such as private cottages on communal drinking water systems
- Large non-municipal, non-residential, such as large motels and resorts
- Small non-municipal, non-residential, such as motels, restaurants, gas stations, churches, bed and breakfasts.

Systems serving designated facilities, such as schools, day care facilities, children's camps, etc. would not be affected by this bill and would remain regulated by the Ministry of the Environment.

Public Health Inspection

Under the proposed plan, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will conduct an education and outreach campaign, beginning in July 2007, to inform owners/operators about the regulatory changes.

Beginning in January 2008, it is proposed that public health inspectors will commence conducting individual site assessments of approximately 18,000 affected drinking water systems in the province. After performing the risk-based assessments, inspectors will educate owners/operators on what they must do to ensure that their systems provide safe drinking water.

Public health inspectors will receive extensive training on the risk assessment tool and the site-specific risk assessment process. As part of their duties, the inspectors will:

- Conduct initial and periodic risk assessments, based on the frequency as determined by the risk category of the system (low, medium or high-risk)
- Determine treatment, sampling, operational checks and maintenance for individual systems once the risk assessment has been completed
- Respond to laboratory reports of adverse drinking water quality
- Respond to complaints from consumers
- Educate operators on how to maintain their drinking water systems.

Owner/Operator Training

At the time of the risk assessment, public health inspectors will determine what training the owners/operators may need.

For simple systems with no treatment requirements, operators will be given on-site instruction by the public health inspectors, which may include self-study printed material. Owners/operators may also be asked to attend group sessions at the local health unit office. The majority of drinking water systems affected are expected to be simple.

For systems with treatment requirements, owners/operators may be required to complete the Ministry of Environment's existing Operation of Small Drinking Water Systems correspondence course.

For some systems that, because of the water source may require a multi-step process for water treatment (e.g. coagulation, chemical processes), owners/operators may be required to complete certification under the Ministry of Environment's Certification of Drinking-Water System Operators and Water Quality Analysts.

MOE will also continue to license and inspect testing laboratories. The MOE will retain overall responsibility for drinking water policy and standard setting.

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