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Sask Water 02-000

PROVINCE ANNOUNCES NEW WATER STRATEGY

The provincial government is taking action to ensure safe, high quality drinking water for the people of Saskatchewan.

The government accepts the recommendations directed to it in the North Battleford water inquiry final report, Minister Responsible for Sask Water Buckley Belanger said. We encourage the city of North Battleford and health districts to accept those recommendations directed at them.

We are also announcing a new province-wide water strategy.

The Report on the Commission of Inquiry into the public drinking water in North Battleford was released today. Its main recommendations focus on regulatory improvements at Saskatchewan Environment and health districts, increased plant inspection and improving the way water is managed in North Battleford.

In response to those recommendations, the government has announced a three-point strategy to secure safe drinking water from source to tap:

1. Enhanced Regulation

The government is adding \$2.4 million to increase the number of plant inspections to an average of one to two per year, improve the provision of water quality information to the public and regulatory staff, and expand drinking water safety regulations. This brings the total new funding added for drinking water regulation to \$3.8 million and the total number of new positions to 33 in the last two budget years.

2. Watershed Protection

The watershed management activities of Sask Water, Saskatchewan Environment and Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation (SWCC) are being combined to form a new Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. This new authority will balance competing water and land uses that impact water quality.

3. Improved Water Treatment Plant Delivery

Sask Water is being restructured to deliver water and wastewater treatment plant operations and consulting services to Saskatchewan communities and industries. Its regulatory approval role in constructing water plants is being transferred to Saskatchewan Environment.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program will be a major source of funding for municipal water capital projects. The program, which is cost-shared by the federal, provincial and municipal governments, provided \$30 million for water and sewer infrastructure in the province during 2001/02. Belanger said a significant increase in funds for water projects is anticipated for 2002/03, with details to be announced by the federal and provincial governments later this month.

In addition to grant programs, the province assists municipal governments to borrow funds and amortize costs for capital projects through the Municipal Financing Corporation.

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