

Walkerton and the O'Connor Inquiry

Many of the Ministry of the Environment's drinking water source protection initiatives are based on recommendations from Justice Dennis O'Connor's Report of the Walkerton Inquiry. The following includes information on the Walkerton Inquiry and a review of the MOE's progress on these recommendations.

What is the Report of the Walkerton Inquiry?

In May 2000, drinking water contaminated with *E.coli* and *campylobacter* bacteria resulted in the death of seven people and made over 2300 ill in Walkerton, Ontario. After the tragedy, the Ontario government established a public Inquiry led by the Honourable Dennis O'Connor.

Justice O'Connor's findings were released in two volumes. *The Report of the Walkerton Inquiry, Part One: The Events of May 2000 and Related Issues* reported on the events in Walkerton and the causes of the tragedy. It was released in January 2002 and contained 28 recommendations. *Part Two: A Strategy for Safe Drinking Water* was released in May 2002 and contained 93 recommendations.

In response to Justice O'Connor's Walkerton recommendations calling for improvements in addressing issues in the operation and maintenance of water treatment and distribution, the Ontario Government passed the *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002* and the *Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, 2002*. Justice O'Connor also recommended that the province adopt a multi-barrier system to protecting Ontario's drinking water and identified the first barrier in this approach as source protection. That is why the Ontario government proclaimed the *Clean Water Act (CWA)* and passed the first set of regulations under the Act on July 3, 2007. The CWA's focus on prevention as its fundamental principle represents the first barrier in Ontario's multi-barrier approach to protection Ontario's drinking water sources.

Part One of the Walkerton Inquiry Report:

- Part one of the Walkerton Inquiry Report was released on January 18, 2002. The Report examines the circumstances and causes of *E.coli* contamination in the Walkerton water supply, including the impact of government policy and procedures.
- Part One of the Walkerton Inquiry Report makes 28 recommendations regarding:
 - Public health units
 - Enhancing communication between MOE and health units
 - Developing a boil water protocol
 - Approvals and inspections
 - Training and certification

- MOE business processes (including business management).

As of August 2007:

- **All 28 recommendations of Part One of the Walkerton Inquiry Report have been implemented through the following initiatives:**
 - New operator training and certification regulation under the SDWA
 - Annual inspections/protocols
 - Development of a drinking water inspection protocol
 - Time limited Certificates of Approval
 - Regular meetings between MOE & local health units
 - Continuous monitoring of chlorine and turbidity
 - Communal drinking water systems training courses for inspectors
 - Filling vacant Medical Officer of Health positions
 - Staff training and business process improvements
 - Conducting random assessments of public health boards
 - Completion of the Drinking Water Ontario portal
 - Development of the Response to Adverse Drinking Water Quality Incidents: Guidance Document.
 - improvements to our information management and technology.

Part Two of the Walkerton Inquiry Report

- Part Two of the Walkerton Inquiry Report, was released on May 23, 2002. The Report makes 93 recommendations on a multi-barrier approach to managing drinking water and identifies what is needed to reduce risk to public health at every stage of the system.
- Part Two of the Walkerton Inquiry Report recommendations fall under the following key areas:
 - The need for a *Safe Drinking Water Act*
 - Financial requirements for sustainability
 - Licensing and accreditation
 - Watershed-based source protection

As of August 2007:

- **All 93 Recommendations of Part Two of the Walkerton Inquiry Report have been implemented through the following initiatives:**

- As a result of the passage of the *Clean Water Act, 2006* and implementation of the regulation under the *Nutrient Management Act, 2002*
- As part of the *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002* (the new Ontario Drinking Water Quality Standards Regulation, Drinking Water Testing Services Regulation, Drinking Water Systems Regulation & Operator and Certification Regulation);
- As a result of the establishment of MOE's Drinking Water Management Division and appointment of a Chief Drinking Water inspector;
- As part of standards setting;
- As a result of the establishment of an Advisory Council on Drinking-Water Quality and Testing Standards;
- As a result of requirements under the *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002* for licensing of municipal drinking water systems, strengthened compliance and enforcement and the preparation of emergency response plans;
- As a result of a review of the Drinking Water Haulage Guideline; and
- As a result of the first-ever annual Minister's drinking water report.
- As a result of establishing a separate Source Protection Program Branch;
- As a result of the publication of a series of best management practices on Sewer Use;
- As a result of the Financial Plans Regulation and Guideline for municipal drinking water systems;
- As a result of establishing a financial assistance program for small drinking water systems;
- As a result of improving our information management and technology; and
- As a result of clarifying the Ontario Clean Water Agency's (OCWA) status and mandate and the appointment of independent members to OCWA's Board.