



Media Backgrounder

April 21, 2003

TAKING ACTION TO PROTECT ONTARIO'S DRINKING WATER AT SOURCE

In addition to moving forward on a provincial framework for watershed-based source protection planning, the Ontario government is taking many actions related to protecting drinking water sources.

Permit To Take Water: Today, the Ontario government announced a six-month moratorium on permits for uses where the water leaves the watershed on the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine. The government also posted proposed improvements to the Water Taking and Transfer Regulation for a 30-day public comment period. These changes will ensure Ontario continues to have tough environmental protection through its permit process.

Groundwater studies: On April 14, 2003, the government provided \$5 million to municipalities and conservation authorities to continue groundwater study coverage with the goal of mapping wellhead protection areas in all communities that rely on groundwater and mapping sensitive groundwater areas across all of southern Ontario. This is part of the government's more than \$19 million investment in groundwater studies since 2000. With this funding, conservation authorities, municipalities and other partners are conducting studies that produce groundwater information critical to watershed-based protection planning as envisioned by Commissioner O'Connor.

Well construction and maintenance: On April 10, 2003, the government introduced tougher rules for well construction and decommissioning and higher performance standards for well technicians. The amendments to the Wells Regulation (O. Reg. 903) make Ontario a leading jurisdiction in North America for well construction. They apply to the construction of all new wells throughout Ontario, and proper abandonment of any well that is not in use including: private wells, municipal wells, farm wells for irrigation and livestock watering, commercial wells, industrial wells, monitoring wells, dewatering wells and test holes.

The government also announced \$600,000 in new funding for Sir Sandford

Fleming College to support training costs for those who construct wells. To date, ~~the province has invested \$2.85 million to support wells research, continuing~~ education for well technicians and well owner education.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, through the Healthy Futures for Ontario Agriculture program, has invested funds to develop the Rural Well Upgrading and Decommissioning Project for rural resident of Ontario (both farm and non-farm). The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is administering this project on behalf of the County Federations.

Pilot Project with the City of Ottawa: The government provided \$230,000 to support a pilot program in the City of Ottawa. Homeowners with new or modified wells within rural sections of the city will be invited to voluntarily sign up for a free well inspection and analysis of water quality. The pilot project will give the Ministry of the Environment insight into the effectiveness of local well inspection programs as an option for promoting compliance with the government's new wells regulations.

Nutrient Management Act, 2002: The Act – passed on June 27, 2002 – will play an important role in protecting sources of drinking water by minimizing the effects of agricultural practices on the environment, especially as they relate to land-applied materials containing nutrients. Thirty-four information sessions and public consultation meetings were held across the province over the fall of 2002 and winter 2003. They were conducted in two stages, covering two sets of draft regulations.

Provincial groundwater monitoring network: In June 2000, the government announced \$6 million to establish monitoring wells in partnership with Ontario's conservation authorities. Over 300 monitoring wells were in place by March 2003, and many are already reporting information. The network will help support the development, implementation and monitoring of future source-protection plans by collecting information on groundwater levels and quality.

Provincial water quality monitoring network: Set up in partnership with 28 conservation authorities, more than 350 stations collect surface water quality information from rivers and streams at strategic locations throughout Ontario. The information is used for a number of purposes, including providing information to support watershed planning and management.

Surface water quantity monitoring: The province's surface water quantity monitoring network provides real time, continuous data and historical records on water levels and flows – information critical to the preparation of source-protection plans.

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Contacts: