



CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU DROIT DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

June 3, 2005

CELA Publication #510

The Honourable Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of the Environment
12th Flr
135 St Clair Ave W
Toronto, ON M4V 1P5

Via Facsimile & Regular Mail

Re: Well Aware

Dear Minister Dombrowsky:

It has recently come to CELA's attention that the highly regarded Well Aware program has reached the end of previously committed funding for the continuation of the program. We write to urge you to review the benefits of the Well Aware program and to reinstate funding in order to build on and continue the delivery of the Well Aware program.

Through a number of delivery mechanisms, highly useful and pertinent information has been prepared to assist well owners with proper protection of their drinking water wells.

That this is a highly important issue was highlighted in a number of reports including the recently delivered Technical Experts' Report on watershed source protection which highlighted how crucial it is to provide protection from the pathways to groundwater aquifers that improperly built or maintained private wells provide. If not properly maintained, such wells can amount to an immediate short circuit taking ground level contaminants into the groundwater aquifer.

The Technical Experts report recommended that the province develop a comprehensive program to address private water supplies; it suggested that a primary focus of such a program should be the prevention of pathogen contamination of private wells and intakes.

The Source Protection Implementation committee stressed that education and outreach should be a primary tool to reach owners of private wells. It specifically recommended greater efforts to provide the public with clear and comprehensible guidance materials in order to highlight the risks associated with private wells, support and clarify existing requirements, and support the ongoing use and establishment of best practices.

Similarly, in his Report of the Walkerton Inquiry, Justice O'Connor highlighted this issue in Recommendation 86:

“With regard to private drinking water systems that are not covered by either Ontario Regulation 459/00 or Ontario Regulation 505/01, the provincial government should provide the public with information about how to supply water safely and should ensure that this information is well distributed. It should also maintain the system of licensing well drillers and ensure the easy availability of microbiological testing, including testing for *E. coli*.” (emphasis added).

Notably, in discussing this recommendation, Justice O'Connor stated that

“One important contribution for the provincial government in this area lies in providing information to the public on such topics as wells and their protection, water treatment options, and good sanitation practices. Much of this information exists in some form, but improvements in presentation are required, as are more technical resources to complement simplified consumer information.”

The Well Aware program has now already developed excellent presentation material for private well owners including a very accessible Well Aware video narrated by Bob McDonald, and provides important technical assistance through the partner delivery organizations, the Green Communities Association and the Ontario Ground Water Association. The Association of Professional Geoscientists of Ontario provides technical support.

The program involves distributing booklets, conducting community outreach and guided self-assessments, and hosting community forums and information provider workshops. Well Aware Phase II reached 100,000 well owners.

In six communities, namely Lanark and Leeds, Peterborough, Hamilton, Wellington County, York Region and Thunder Bay, Water Guides were trained to help people take action to protect their drinking water through voluntary, confidential visits to assist with the self-assessment to identify and address potential risks to the owners' well water. In addition, Information Provider Workshops were held for frontline people in each community who have regular contact with well owners, including real estate agents, health unit inspectors, municipal staff and others. A province-wide facilitator reviewed groundwater basics, best management practices, roles and responsibilities of different agencies and partnership development.

Co-operating in development of the Well Aware materials and program were provincial ministries of environment, health and agriculture, Ontario Groundwater Association, Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors – Ontario Branch, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Conservation Ontario, Association of Professional Geoscientists of Ontario and the Ontario Soil and Crop Association, as well as numerous health units, environmental groups, conservation authorities and stewardship councils at the local level.

CELA is of the view that the Well Aware program that has been so successfully and rigorously developed should be continued and expanded and in particular that this “wheel” should not be re-invented!

CELA urges you to expeditiously review the many benefits of Well Aware, to note how important an information need it is meeting, and to provide the next phase of funding which we urge you to expand to provide for direct delivery in even more communities.

Yours truly,

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa A. McClenaghan', written in a cursive style.

Theresa A. McClenaghan
Counsel

cc. Green Communities Canada