TOP HEALTH OFFICER RELEASES DRINKING WATER REPORT

VICTORIA – Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall today acknowledged improvements made to many of the province’s drinking water systems and also highlighted a number of recommendations to government and partner agencies on how to improve drinking water for British Columbians in the Progress on the Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia 2008 report.

“This report builds on recommendations made in the previous drinking water report in 2007,” said Kendall. “Government and water suppliers have made substantial improvements in how drinking water in the province is managed. Most people in the province enjoy excellent water quality. We’ve made good progress; however, more work needs to be done to ensure everyone in the province has access to safe drinking water.”

Over the past two years, government has made changes to legislation and regulations to clarify responsibilities, improve water testing and reporting procedures, and increase enforcement. Government has provided $54 million in funding towards upgrading or replacing aging infrastructure for this reporting period. In addition, new drinking water staff positions in health authorities have been filled and three additional labs are up and running that are actively testing drinking water.

The Progress on the Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia (2008) report binds all ministries to the commitments in the plan and its eight principles. The report makes 18 recommendations, some of which include:

- All water suppliers need to undertake thorough assessments of their systems and develop assessment response plans;
- Government should continue to improve monitoring for potential impacts of resource activities on drinking water.
- Rates for drinking water should reflect the true, long-term costs of water treatment, distribution and water system operation, maintenance and monitoring

The report covers the periods from 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. In compiling the report, several other government ministries were consulted, as well as health authorities, medical health officers, public health engineers, environmental health officers, and water purveyors.
The Provincial health officer has a general mandate, under both the Health Act and the Drinking Water Protection Act, to report on the health of British Columbians. This is the third PHO report on drinking water.

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