
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health
Office of the Provincial Health Officer

Drinking Water Report highlights progress made

VICTORIA – Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall released the 2011 Progress Report on the Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia today, outlining progress made and highlighting areas for additional improvement in the province's drinking water systems.

The report covers programs during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 fiscal years, and is a mandated function of the PHO under the Drinking Water Protection Act. During this reporting period, drinking water officers conducted more than 4,800 water system inspections and government provided \$935,000 to assist in 101 planning projects.

The report highlights progress made on the Province's drinking water quality goals set out in the Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water. For example:

- No community outbreaks of water-borne illness related to drinking water systems were reported during the reporting period.
- The number of water systems with valid operating permits increased by over 1,000 to a total of 4,539 in March 2009. In addition, the number of systems with an emergency response plan increased from under 1,500 in 2007 to over 2,500 in 2009.
- The number of boil-water advisories increased from 480 in 2006 to 604 in March 2009, reflecting increased emphasis on assessing small systems and ensuring that those failing to meet safety criteria were issuing appropriate advisories to their customers.
- Regulations under the Environmental Management Act were introduced or updated and include measures that will serve to protect drinking water.
- The Ministry of Environment continued to develop water quality guidelines for specific water quality variables in source water, and established water quality objectives to protect the most sensitive water use at a specific location.
- During the reporting period, the Ministry of Community and Rural Development provided 101 grants to communities to help them plan for improvements to their drinking water systems.
- Regional drinking water teams were established in each of the regional health authorities to ensure co-ordination across ministries.
- The Water Action Plan for B.C. was finalized.

Despite this progress, there remain challenges that continue to need further work. For example, data collection and reporting at a regional and provincial level continues to be an issue. However, health authorities have been working to make improvements to their information management systems.

In addition, there remains a lack of drinking water infrastructure in some smaller communities. However, protocols do exist to allow transfer of water systems to local government as local service areas, with full access to infrastructure grants.

Drinking water quality is crucial to the health and safety of British Columbians – the Province and health authorities are always working to make sure B.C.'s drinking water is safe and looking for ways to improve processes. Through the Ministry of Health and the regional health authorities, policies and regulations under the Drinking Water Protection Act continue to be refined to address known and emerging issues, and maintain high drinking water quality standards.

Quote:

Dr. Perry Kendall, provincial health officer –

“Government continues to make progress to protect and improve the health of British Columbia’s drinking water systems, though there remains more work to do. Here in B.C., we have over 4,550 water systems, the vast majority of which are small systems. It is important that we continue to work with operators to help them maintain water safety.”

Quick Facts:

- The eight principles of the Drinking Water Action Plan are:
 - The safety of drinking water is a public health issue.
 - Source protection is a critical part of drinking water protection.
 - Providing safe drinking water requires an integrated approach.
 - All water systems need to be thoroughly assessed to determine risks.
 - Proper treatment and water distribution system integrity are important to protect human health.
 - Tap water must meet acceptable safety standards and be monitored.
 - Small systems require a flexible system with safeguards.
 - Safe drinking water should be affordable, with users paying appropriate costs.
- Throughout the Province ,there are more than 4,550 drinking water systems: 478 in the Fraser Health Authority, 746 in the Vancouver Island Health Authority, 1,114 in the Northern Health Authority, 361 in Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, and 1,851 in the Interior Health Authority.
- Of those 4,550 systems, 225 serve more than 300 individual connections, 997 serve between 15 and 300 connections and 3,328 serve less than 15 connections.

Learn More:

Read the full drinking water report at: www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho/reports/drinkingwater.html

Read more about drinking water in B.C. and the Drinking Water Protection Act at:
www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/dw_index.html

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