

**SECOND (2nd) CANADIAN POLICY FORUM
ON DRINKING WATER
AND
THE ELEVENTH (11th) CANADIAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Promoting Public Health through Safe Drinking Water

**CALGARY, ALBERTA
Telus Conference Centre, April 3-6, 2004**



**A BRIEF REPORT BY
BC TAP WATER ALLIANCE COORDINATOR,
WILL KOOP**

INTRODUCTION

The **Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Drinking Water**, which is responsible for developing the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*, sponsored the eleventh national conference (the first conference was held in February 1984, in Ottawa) and second national policy forum held in Calgary, Alberta. Event organizers were surprised at the attendance, over 350 delegates, representing various levels of government (national, territorial, provincial, municipal, etc.), consultants, private industry, and First Nations. I was (apparently) the lone “enviro” or NGO representative.

The reason for the large turnout has had a lot to do with initiatives and interests related to “post Walkerton”. For example, Ian Smith, Ontario Environment Ministry Manager of the Standards Development Branch, summarized his provincial government’s mandate to comprehensively address surface and groundwater drinking water sources and their long-term integrity, to be administered through a new public *White Paper*. That mandate stemmed from the Walkerton Inquiry, where Justice O’Connor, in part two of his final report, provided 18 recommendations for “strong protection” of Ontario’s drinking sources. During question period, I asked Smith if he knew of any other provincial or territorial jurisdiction that was conducting a similar intensive program, to which he replied, probably not. Post Walkerton has also turned out to be a big boom for the water industry and related consultants in Canada.

I learned about the conference a week and half before the event. Fortunately, four donors provided the funding for the trip. That included: \$120 in printing costs for the four-page newsletter that I specifically wrote for the occasion and handed out to conference delegates; \$300 for a return flight; \$165 for registration (the Canadian Water & Waste Association kindly granted us a student rate, and we saved about \$300 from the full rate); about \$300 for a hotel room; about \$100 in total transportation costs (airport shuttles, taxis); and \$50 for food. Without the donations I could not have attended, and I wish to thank those who did. As a result, many of the delegates learned about the concerns of the BC Tap Water Alliance through the newsletter that I handed to delegates. It created attention and discussion during the forum.



Will Koop at the Conference

OH LITTLE TOWN OF ERICKSON

Following the plenary session on Sunday morning, with guest speaker Professor Don Bursill from Salisbury, Australia (chief scientist at the Australian Water Quality Centre), three concurrent workshops ran continuously during the remaining three-day event. Following lunch on the first afternoon, Yolanda Yim, a University of British Columbia (BC) graduate student (Sustainable Development Resource Institute), presented findings from her thesis based on a survey of the town of Erickson's opposition to chlorine as a water treatment, *Public Perceptions of Drinking Water Risk: A Community Perspective*, an issue that has received national media attention. The small room was packed. Yim described how she interviewed 11 people in the community and sent out "300 random mail-out surveys, with a 27 percent response". The community has never had chlorine treatment since its water supply began in 1929. The survey showed that "opposition to chlorine strongly related to concerns about resource development" (ongoing proposed logging, mining).

During the short question period, Steve Hrudehy, professor of Environmental Health Sciences at the University of Alberta (Edmonton), asked: "Yolanda. It came through a bit in your presentation, and it also appeared in the leaflet we were given this morning from a BC group. There seemed to be a belief that chlorine was linked to approval of logging. I can't quite make that connection yet. Can you tell us how chlorination can lead to approval of logging?" (videotape transcript) I then approached the microphone: "I just wanted to address that. I'm the one who handed out that leaflet. It was back in 1988, in an Integrated Watershed Management Plan, which the community opposed, it was identified through Ministry of Forests studies that before logging begins chlorine would have to be applied to the community. As a result, in 1989 [actually, 1988] the Town of Creston and the community of Erickson sent in letters of opposition to both chlorine and logging to the government. So, it originated in 1988." I noticed that professor Hrudehy was shaking his head in disbelief after my interjection. I wrote a case history report on the Arrow Creek Watershed Reserve, the source of Erickson and Creston's water supply, in January 2002, available on this website, which provided citations from the government report and correspondence information on this particular issue. The small article in our newsletter obviously touched on a sensitive nerve. Moreover, there are numerous examples from earlier Ministry of Health correspondence files that clearly indicate that when a protected and untreated water source was faced with commercial resource use, treatment, via simple chlorine disinfection, was required.

The following day, Monday morning, professor Hrudehy gave a workshop presentation, *Converting*



Hindsight into Foresight - A Quality Management Challenge for the Drinking Water Industry. I didn't attend the session, but a senior Alberta Environment official told me about his talk, that in one of the five case studies that he reviewed, one involved the Erickson incident. Apparently he wrote about the issue in his forthcoming book, *Safe Drinking Water: Lessons from Recent Outbreaks in Affluent Nations* (see website, www.iwapublishing.com/template for a summary, and also summarized in the Canadian Science Writers Association 33rd Annual Conference summary for June 5-7, 2004, website www.sciencewriters.ca/conference). I then found Hrudehy and asked what he said about Erickson during his talk. He said that he thought the Erickson residents were off the mark in

opposing chlorine. I then summarized the background of the debate for him. Given the complexity of the local circumstances, I suggested it was important to research all the facts before making summaries about the issue. About an hour and a half later, Hrudehy told me he was concerned about

the summary of the BC Ministry of Health and Medical Health officers in my newsletter. I then went into quickly summarizing my report, *Doctoring Our Water: From a Policy of Protection to a Policy of Submission*, on the history of the Ministry of Health on this issue. On a point of analogy, to elaborate on how people and governments sometimes become influenced, I asked him if he was aware of how Alberta's forest industry had any hand in influencing the outcome of science studies and reports at his University in Edmonton. He denied that such was the case. I then pointed out to him, as is common knowledge, how industries throughout the world try to skewer report findings for the self-benefit of those industries, and that governments and civil servants have been influenced by such forces. The man standing next to Hrudehy started smiling.



Photo above: Series of two intake settling ponds at Arrow Creek, the water supply for Creston and Erickson. The settling ponds have been here for decades. The new controversial plan for (\$10 million plus) membrane filtration is to pipe the water from this point down to a lower elevation, and then with a series of 16 pumps to pump water to the communities, bypassing the "free" system of gravity used since 1929. (Photo taken August 2000)

WORST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

There were a few workshop sessions, under themes of *Water Protection and Management*, *Emerging Issues and Challenges for Public Health*, which were dedicated to examining fecal contamination (through DNA testing of water molecules or Ribotyping) from non-human sources, primarily wildlife. There was no presentation, however, that examined the impacts of domestic cattle or sheep on drinking water quality. Given the prevalent problem of this issue in many parts of Canada, including BC, I mentioned this to Barry Boettger in private on the morning of the last day of the conference. Boettger, the BC Ministry of Health Drinking Water Project Manager, represents

BC on the National Committee on Drinking Water and is presently its vice-chair, and has been sitting on the Committee for a number of years. I asked him if he knew how many community and domestic watersheds in BC had domestic livestock ranging within them. He replied that he didn't know. I then asked him why he didn't, as this was a central issue to his Ministry, and asked who could provide me with the information. He said that the Ministry of Forests Range personnel headquartered in Victoria knew. I then suggested that when I get a hold of the information, that I would forward it to him (I contacted the Range people in Victoria as soon as I got home and they said that there was no such list available). I also asked him if he was aware of the BC Forest Practices Branch reports on the nature, impacts, and public concerns about cattle grazing in community watersheds. He said he was aware of them. I then commented that a Forest Practices Board member informed me that he thought (off the top of his head) over 250 community watersheds allow forms of cattle grazing. I then pointed out, and asked Boettger, why, at this conference, there was so much attention on wildlife with respect to drinking water sources and not on livestock. He said he didn't know why, but mentioned that I should contact Lorne Fitch in Alberta with Cows and Fish: Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society (website: www.cowsandfish.org). That organization has examined domestic livestock and Best Management Practices in Alberta, with recommendations for riparian grazing on fresh water stream courses. Partners of that organization include Alberta Beef Producers, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, and Alberta's Ministry of Environment.

I inferred from Boettger that he endorsed the general findings of Cows and Fish as a guideline for BC's community and domestic watersheds, a highly questionable position. The BC Tap Water Alliance recently addressed the matter of domestic livestock in public drinking water sources in its June 30, 2002 report, *Results-Based Management of British Columbia's Drinking Water Source Watersheds: A Submission to the Public Panel and Review Process for a Results-Based Forest and Range Practices Regime for British Columbia*, mentioned in part five, *Downloading Liability - Post Cranbrook: Range permits for cattle grazing in domestic/community watersheds*.

Boettger sat on the conference's 15 member Technical Program Committee, which included a number of Alberta representatives: co-chair William Robertson (Health Canada); co-chair Karu Chinniah (Alberta Environment); Dr. Mike Belosevic (Univ. of Alberta); David Briggins (Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour); Dr. Joe Bergman (Buffalo Pound Water Administration Board); Duane Flemming (Northwest Territories Health and Social Services); Dr. Les Gammie (EPCOR Water Services Inc.); Dr. Steve Hrudehy (University of Alberta); Kelly Lehman (Health Canada); Rodger McDonald (M.R.2 - McDonald & Assoc.); Thon Phommavong (Saskatchewan Environment); Ken Voss, City of Calgary); Ian Wright (Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd.).

WHITHER THE FUTURE?

The BC Tap Water Alliance will keep a pulse on the National Drinking Water Committee and will forward its concerns for legislative protection of BC's drinking watershed sources. We will make that information available for readers on our website.