

# B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

**Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting  
British Columbia's Community Water  
Supply Sources**

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## **B.C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE CALLS FOR DR. JOHN BLATHERWICK'S RESIGNATION**

*Vancouver* - The Capilano highway debate is once again being proposed, this time for the 2010 Winter Olympic bid for Whistler entrepreneurs by the Richmond-Vancouver chief Medical Health Officer as quoted in the Vancouver Sun newspaper, October 24, 2001, page B7. According to John Blatherwick:

It's time for Greater Vancouver to put an end to its closed watershed policy and allow construction of a safe alternative highway to Whistler. The death toll on the Sea to Sky Highway is unacceptable", and that the highway "would also boost Vancouver's chances of winning its bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics." "I believe if we're going to put the 2010 Olympics into Vancouver you can't keep killing people on the Sea to Sky Highway. You could drive a road up through, particularly, the Capilano watershed. You can do it and still preserve the protected watershed. Blatherwick said that the GVRD is so possessive of its watersheds that it resisted filtration for decades for fear that adopting it would weaken its no-access policy - while insisting that even at its most turbid and murky looking, Greater Vancouver water was perfectly safe to drink." "He says road construction could commence once filtration plants are operational, and be finished in time for the Olympics." "The GVRD's recent decision to build filtration plants to treat water coming from Seymour and Capilano removes the biggest objection that the region's staff and directors can muster to block the construction of a highway, said Blatherwick, Vancouver-Richmond medical health officer and Greater Vancouver's foremost advocate for the public's health." "Blatherwick anticipates that the no access policy will be increasingly under attack as the political decision makers come to recognize the efficiency of our proposed filtration system. While he's reluctant to see canoeists ply the North Shore reservoirs just yet, he's calling for a serious discussion about constructing a new highway.

"We are calling for Dr. John Blatherwick's immediate resignation as a public health advocate. He is once again stepping out beyond his portfolio, this time to become an unabashed political advocate for the 2010 Winter Olympics bid to construct a freeway through the Capilano watershed, a proposal which is both absurd and unethical", says Will Koop, coordinator of the B.C. Tap Water Alliance. "His proposal not only runs contrary to his mandate to speak for the public's long term health, but it is also contrary to the Greater Vancouver public's 74 year-old provincially-based legislation which aims to protect its watersheds from industrial developments and public access, and opposes the position and policy of previous provincial and municipal medical health officers who advocated the full protection of the Greater Vancouver watersheds. A filtration plant should never be understood as a magic pill or

an excuse to desecrate our domestic watersheds. We don't need an apologist for developers, but a strong advocate for public health and conservation.”

By way of background, the proposal for a highway in the Capilano first came to a furore fifty years ago in 1950-51 by a similar proposal from the Squamish town area-based Howe Sound Highway Committee, a controversial issue which was strongly rejected by the Greater Vancouver Water District, along with the unanimous support of all Greater Vancouver municipalities. The issue, which was supported at that time by Social Credit Party MLA's, notably Highway Minister Phil Gaglardi, was once again rejected in a long report in 1954 by Water Commissioner Theodore Berry. [For a brief history of this debate, refer to Chapter 5, *The Capilano Highway Debate*, in Will Koop's April 1993 draft manuscript, *Wake Up Vancouver!*] The issue has since resurfaced a number of times, every so briefly, and snuffed out as quickly as it was suggested.

In a February 24, 1989 article in the Vancouver Sun, *Gas link in watershed fought - Fears voiced on impact of pipeline*, Blatherwick was opposed to the proposed construction of a natural gas pipeline route through the Coquitlam watershed. “We want to protect that for the future”, he stated, because of “good, safe, clear mountain water.” “After construction of the pipeline, if something goes wrong, taxpayers could be faced with a \$200 million to \$300 million bill for filtration facilities, Blatherwick warned.” Though Blatherwick's argument for a highway proposal is based on the eventual completion of an expensive water filtration plant, he was nevertheless arguing, at that time, for the protection of the Coquitlam watershed.

There are many risks and hazards associated with both the construction and long-term placement of a freeway in the Capilano water supply watershed, which Dr. Blatherwick failed to elaborate on. The construction phase and equipment will bring great risks to our water supply by erosion of sediments and possible contamination via fuel spills. Water run-off from the completed highway during rainstorms will bring petro-chemicals and oil residues into the stream systems, and snow-clearing methods will also bring whatever sediments/chemicals into our water. There is always the risk of accidents, the hazards of spills into our water from transport trucks and vehicles. Finally, the likelihood of a forest fire from passing motorists and the possibility of those wishing to poison our water for political agendas. Ultimately, Dr. Blatherwick's proposal is one which may have precedence for similar proposals in other domestic watersheds, and should therefore be rejected by all British Columbians.

“Dr. Blatherwick's proposal runs contrary to federal and provincial legislation passed at the beginning of the 1900s for the full protection of provincial water supply sources by the legal designation of Watershed Reserves,” says Koop. “We cannot afford to mistreat our water supply sources for the whims and pressures of opportunistic agendas. When it comes to drinking water, we all need to treat these places with the greatest reverence and respect, and especially by those who represent the public's health.”