

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE OF ISSUE: July 14, 2020

Magazine article shows ways Ontario's drinking water has been protected in 20 years since Walkerton water tragedy

Environmental Science & Engineering Magazine shares some of the ways protection has been added to Ontario's drinking water over past two decades, reducing risk to public health

The June-July 2020 issue of *Environmental Science & Engineering Magazine* includes a new article about how Ontario has added protection to drinking water sources over the past 20 years since the Walkerton water contamination tragedy of 2000. To read the article please visit this link: https://issuu.com/esemag/docs/ese_magazine-2020-june-july/40

In May of 2000, seven people died and more than 2,300 people became ill after the drinking water supply in Walkerton, Ontario, was contaminated with *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 and *Campylobacter jejuni* bacteria. Severe long-term illnesses, from that contamination, have included kidney failure, arthritis, and neurological damage.

The article documents many of the needed improvements put into place since the Walkerton Inquiry, an independent Commission presided over by Commissioner Dennis R. O'Connor, a Justice of the Court of Appeal for Ontario. The inquiry recommended improvements to "all aspects of the drinking water system in Ontario, including the protection of drinking water sources; the treatment, distribution, and monitoring of drinking water; the operation and management of water systems; and the full range of functions involved in the provincial regulatory role."

The new magazine article was co-authored by municipal and source protection staff (including program managers from local source protection regions and source protection authorities and Conservation Ontario). Elements to successful drinking water source protection, according to the article, include: sound technical information; support from landowners who understand the need for ongoing protection of our drinking water sources; and strong working relationships with local municipalities and provincial ministries.

The article focuses on one of the laws passed and enacted since the Walkerton tragedy, the Ontario *Clean Water Act, 2006*. The law mandates protection of drinking water sources for municipal residential drinking water systems. Nineteen local source protection committees in Ontario have put into action locally developed, provincially approved source protection plans to reduce risk to drinking water sources. The article explains some of the tools used to manage risk from activities that could pose a significant threat to drinking water. One of the ways water is protected, as outlined in the article, is through risk management plans required to manage and reduce risk from certain activities near municipal wells.

The June-July 2020 article also shares the science and technical work that has been completed over the past 20 years, including identification of water quality issues and mapping of municipal wellhead protection areas and surface water intake protection zones. The article shares some recent technical work including a climate change vulnerability assessment pilot study, led by Conservation Ontario, the network organization of Ontario's 36 conservation authorities. The Municipality of Huron East assisted with the study to help municipalities gain an understanding of climate change impacts on the source water quality of their wells.

Local drinking water source protection program co-supervisors Mary Lynn MacDonald and Donna Clarkson, of Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Source Protection Region, and Kyle Davis, Risk Management Official with Wellington County Source Water Protection, are among the new article's co-authors. The other authors are Carl Seider (Saugeen, Grey Sauble, Northern Bruce Peninsula Source Protection Region); David Ellingwood (North Bay-Mattawa Source Protection Authority); Amy Dickens (Quinte Conservation and Trent Conservation Coalition Source Protection Region); Melissa Carruthers (Severn Sound Environmental Association and Source Protection Authority); and Chitra Gowda (previously at Conservation Ontario).

– 30 –

MEDIA CONTACTS: Mary Lynn MacDonald, Program Co-Supervisor, Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Drinking Water Source Protection Region, at mmacdonald@abca.ca or phone 519-235-2610 or 1-888-286-2610, extension 247 or Donna Clarkson, Program Co-Supervisor, at 519-335-3557, extension 224.