



August 1, 2003

To: All drinking water suppliers in British Columbia¹

The B.C. government is committed to ensuring safe, reliable and accessible drinking water for all British Columbians. I know this is a goal shared by the province's drinking water suppliers. I am therefore pleased to notify you the amended *Drinking Water Protection Act* and regulation came into force May 16, 2003, replacing the Safe Drinking Water Regulation of the *Health Act*.

With the new legislation, government is meeting its New Era commitment to improve the quality of B.C.'s drinking water. The changes establish a comprehensive, co-ordinated framework for protecting the province's drinking water from "source to tap." While the majority of British Columbians already benefit from high-quality drinking water, improvements are necessary to ensure public health is protected and public expectations for safe, clean drinking water are met.

A vital part of our Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water is new legislation. Overall, the new act and regulation increase basic expectations for assessment, certification, monitoring and reporting. In addition, they strengthen and clarify oversight and accountability. Improving standards at all levels of water supply better protects B.C.'s drinking water.

The new laws are outcome-based, rather than overly prescriptive. With this approach, water suppliers and drinking water officers can determine the most appropriate way to address potential concerns in a particular water system. We are making sure British Columbians enjoy safe, clean, healthy drinking water in a way that is as effective, efficient and reliable as possible.

Health regions are currently developing their new administrative frameworks. When fully implemented, each health region will have a primary drinking water officer responsible for administering the *Drinking Water Protection Act* and regulation.

During the transition period, medical health officers will act as interim drinking water officers until other health officials are formally appointed to these roles. Health authorities will ensure interim measures are in place to address day-to-day needs and you can continue to work with the same public health inspectors, environmental health officers and public health engineers.

Our action plan builds on an evolving drinking water program, and while you may already be meeting the requirements of the *Drinking Water Protection Act*, it is likely you will have several new responsibilities as a water supplier, including the following:

- Your drinking water officer may instruct you to assess the needs of your system and develop an assessment response plan. All water suppliers will undergo a thorough assessment, but existing inspections may constitute that assessment. Assessments required under the *Drinking Water Protection Act* cover source water, treatment, distribution system and operation. Guidance documents for assessments and response plans are currently under development. The assessment requirement acknowledges the need for flexibility in smaller systems. Your drinking water officer will contact you with further details.

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¹ The *Drinking Water Protection Act* defines a water supplier as the owner of a domestic water system supplying drinking water to anything other than a single-family residence. This includes very small water systems, such as those that supply a single business or several residences (a water users community) by well or creek.

- Your system must be classified by the Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP) and operators certified accordingly. An implementation phase will accommodate training of staff. Training for operators is available through a number of organizations, but is separate from certification. You should contact the EOCP as soon as possible at:

Environmental Operators Certification Program
219 - 3823 Henning Drive
Burnaby BC V5C 6P3
Phone: 604 874-4784
Toll Free: 1-866-552-3627
Fax: 604 874-4794

- Water suppliers are responsible for ensuring water samples are taken according to the operating permit and tested by an approved lab. Laboratories must phone both the drinking water officer and you, the water supplier, when test results show the presence of fecal coliform bacteria or *E. coli*. You will need to ensure labs have current contact information when providing samples.
- A public report on your emergency response plan, water monitoring results and any assessment or assessment response plan you have been required to develop must be prepared and made available to your water consumers. Details of the information to include, and how the report will be made public, will be provided by your drinking water officer.

We recognize these requirements are an increase in government's expectations of water suppliers. However, they are necessary to provide safe drinking water and instill consumer confidence in the safety of the water they drink. Many water supply systems, particularly smaller ones, were not always in compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Regulation and, without changes, will have difficulty in complying with the new *Drinking Water Protection Act*. Please be advised that the tolerance shown to non-complying systems in the past will not be afforded to systems in the future.

It may be necessary for smaller system owners to pool their resources or consider amalgamation with larger systems to meet some requirements of the new legislation. Where upgrades are required, we encourage locally developed solutions that meet health standards and take into consideration the economic impact on affected communities. The outcome-based approach of the regulations will allow more flexibility to find workable solutions.

There are many other provisions in the legislation to ensure drinking water is protected from contamination and delivered to consumers in a safe manner. Please familiarize yourself with the *Drinking Water Protection Act* and regulation and your responsibilities as a water supplier. Copies of the act and regulation are posted at www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/protect/water.html, as well as information on the new legislation and Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water.

If you have questions, I encourage you to contact your regional health authority (listed in the blue pages of your telephone directory).

Sincerely,



Colin Hansen
Minister