

Thames, Sydenham & Region - Drinking Water Source Protection Update May 2008

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This newsletter provides regular updates on progress on source water protection in the Thames, Sydenham & Region. For more information on any of the articles or to receive future issues, please contact Debra Kirk, Administrative Assistant, (519) 451-2800 Ext. 223 E-mail: kirkd@thamesriver.on.ca.

Our municipal drinking water comes from lakes, rivers, streams or underground sources (aquifers) located across the province. All of these sources of water are linked in a watershed through the water cycle. Drinking water sources can be easily contaminated. Long-term problems can develop that are costly or even impossible to correct.

Clean and plentiful water supplies are among the most important natural resources. As population grows and development intensifies, the challenge to maintain a high quality water supply becomes more complex. The protection of source areas for water is critical.

In this area, the Upper Thames River, Lower Thames Valley and St. Clair Region Conservation Authorities have partnered together to coordinate the development of Source Protection Plans for our watersheds. We are committed to work with our municipalities, other stakeholders and the public to develop Source Protection Plans that serve to protect our drinking water while taking into account the other needs of our communities.

Source Protection Committee

On November 19, 2007 the Thames-Sydenham and Region Source Protection Committee was appointed. The 22 member committee represents a wide range of interests and brings a considerable breadth of knowledge and experience to the table. As laid out in the regulations, one-third of the Committee is composed of municipal members; members representing the major sectors in the region are to make up one-third of the committee; and environmental non-government organizations, recreation, academics, landowners and individuals make up the remaining one-third. The Minister of the Environment appointed Robert Bedggood as chair of the Thames-Sydenham and Region Source Protection Committee.

The responsibility of the Source Protection Committee is to guide the development of local source protection plans. An important part of this process will be public and stakeholder involvement. Over the next five years, there

will be a number of opportunities to become involved through open houses, forums and working groups. In addition, information will be provided through publications such as this one and through our website at www.sourcewaterprotection.on.ca. Information on committee meetings including notices, meeting minutes and reports can also be accessed through the website.

To date, the Source Protection Committee has been reviewing technical information which has been collected over the last two years. At its February meeting, the Source Protection Committee agreed upon a Mission Statement and a set of Guiding Principles:

Mission Statement:

Protect sources of drinking water by developing a plan based on science and local cooperation.

We value:

- Fair and reasonable solutions
- Consensus within our diverse area group
- Clarity of information
- Open communication
- Respecting diversity of opinion



Stewardship Fund

As part of its commitment to safe drinking water and in conjunction with the Clean Water Act, the Ministry of the Environment has established the Drinking Water Stewardship Fund, a drinking water support program to help landowners take action to reduce threats to local municipal drinking water sources. Fourteen open houses were held throughout the region to inform residents living close to a surface water intake or a municipal wellhead about the program. Funds are still available for eligible projects.



Developing a Terms of Reference

The first major task of the Source Protection Committee will be coming up with a game plan that will guide the source protection planning process for the next five years. The game plan – called the Terms of Reference, will be developed over the next few months with input from municipalities, stakeholders and the public.

The Terms of Reference outlines who does what, when it will happen and how much it will cost. It will guide us through the completion of the Assessment Report and the Source Protection Plan itself. Three municipal forums have already been held. From these forums, two working groups were formed to help with the Terms of Reference. Additional forums will be held in June or July and open houses will be scheduled for September to seek input from the other stakeholders and the public.

The proposed Terms of Reference will be submitted to the Source Protection Authority and posted for final comment in mid-October.

Reports and Research

Draft Watershed Characterization Reports: These reports provide a summary of physical characteristics and water quality for each Source Protection Region (St. Clair region and the Thames region). This report was distributed to municipalities and committee members for comment.

Conceptual Water Budget: The Conceptual Water Budget takes a broad look at elements of the hydrologic cycle. This report has been peer reviewed and accepted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and has been circulated to municipalities for their input. The Tier 1 Water Budget, which is currently being worked on, will identify watersheds where municipal water supplies are potentially stressed and these watersheds would be subject to further study. The Tier 1 Water Budgets should be complete in the summer of 2008.

Intake Protection Zone and Wellhead Protection Area Studies: The Clean Water Act requires that threats are assessed in vulnerable areas. Well Head Protection Areas and Intake Protection Zones are delineated around groundwater wells and surface water intakes to show areas that may be vulnerable to contamination. Vulnerability scores are assigned to indicate the comparative likelihood of a contaminant reaching the intake or well. Draft reports on the delineation and vulnerability score of these vulnerable areas are undergoing municipal review.

As well, threats inventory, issues identification and hazard assessment are also underway. A hazard score represents the relative potential for a contaminant of concern to impact drinking water sources at concentrations significant enough to cause human illness. We expect that directors rules and technical guidance on hazard scoring will be posted on the Environmental Registry (EBR) in mid June.

Currently, technical studies are being conducted to meet the Ministry of Environment October 2006 assessment report guidance documents. New guidance on assessment report technical studies is expected from the Ministry of Environment possibly in June 2008. Technical studies done so far may require revision and updates to meet the new guidance.

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