

Time to Fix Drink Water Problems

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PEMBROKE OBSERVER

A report released this week by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) is highly critical of the Ontario government for not living up to its promises to provide the public with a safe water supply. Two years after the tragedy in Walkerton opened the public's eyes to the need for more stringent controls on water quality, this report examines the province's claim, made in October 2002 by Chris Stockwell, then minister of environment, that "Ontario has and enforces the best and toughest clean water policies in the world."

In the report, Ontario's drinking water quality standards and guidelines are compared with those of the Canadian government, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). For more than half the chemical limits tested, Ontario's provisions either did not exist (no limits to contamination) or had higher maximum levels than those in other jurisdictions.

Anne Mitchell, executive director of CIELAP, said while Ontario's intentions concerning clean drinking water might be good, "it is ore mature to claim that Ontario has the best and toughest clean water policies in the world."

In one of the worst examples found in the report, the acceptable level of PCBs is six times higher in Ontario than is allowed in the United States. Of course, we all know the devastating health effects of PCBs, everything from cancer to immune deficiencies to reproductive and nervous system difficulties.

CIELAP is calling on the Ontario government to form an advisory council as recommended in the report from the Walkerton inquiry to establish tougher report of the Drinking Water Surveillance Program; and ensure that tough new standards are in place that can be monitored and reported through a reliable, completely transparent system.

We don't want another Walkerton. Two years later, it's about time those in power at Queen's Park addressed some of the problems that may have led to the first one.

Whoever may be in power a week from now.