Independent First Nations Alliance

Tribal Council Report Phase II - Executive Summary

Introduction

The Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) was retained by the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation (OFNTSC) to carry out an overall general assessment study of existing water and sewage facilities in certain First Nation communities with regard to the magnitude and scope of existing and potential problems in terms of health and safety risks.

In late March and early April 2001, a representative from OCWA traveled to two of the four communities within the Independent First Nations Alliance (IFNA) and met with the facility operators. The two other communities were not visited. The Tribal Council Technical Services Advisor was not available at the time of the OCWA visits.

From interviews with the operators and the completion of questionnaires, information was collected by OCWA and compiled into individual Community Reports, included in Appendix "A". At the time of the visits, walk through tours of the facilities were conducted by OCWA, and the observations were recorded in the reports. The Tribal Council Report summarizes the findings from the Community Reports.

Community Services

Three of the four Independent First Nations communities are generally located between 15 km to 400 km north of Sioux Lookout. The Pikangikum community is 85 km north of Red Lake. Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Independent First Nations population amounts to 3,645, and there are 932 houses of which:

- 31% of the houses are serviced by communal water systems, 3 houses are serviced by individual wells, 26% are serviced by water haulage to water holding tanks, and the remaining 43% have other individual services; and
- 31% of the houses are serviced by communal sewage systems, 23% are serviced by individual sewage holding tanks with trucked sewage, and the remaining 46% have other individual services.

Pikangikum and Kitchnuhmayoosib Inninuwug have Class I water treatment facilities.

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Risk Assessment

It was reported that two Boil Water Advisories had been placed in the IFNA communities – one on the Pikangikum community, because of the flooding at the water treatment, and one on the Lac Seul community, as reported by Health Canada.

In Pikangikum, the existing WTP flooded in September 2000. Subsequently, a Zenon plant was installed on a temporary basis for drinking only. Water is supplied to the distribution system, but is only chlorinated and not intended for drinking.

In Kitchenuhmayoosib Inninuwug, surface water is chlorinated only and trucked to individual holding tanks. There is no in-ground water distribution system.

The sewage collection system for Pikangikum was not evaluated. The Kitchnuhmayoosib Inninuwug is identified to be high risk because of effluent bypassing, lack of backup power and service disruptions.

OCWA did not visit the Muskrat Dam or Lac Seul community facilities. Based upon the Health Canada sample results, the water treatment facilities have been assessed as high risk for both communities and the sewage treatment facility in the Lac Seul community as high risk.

Definition of Risk

High risk issues may include non-compliance events, broken or malfunctioning equipment, lack of necessary monitoring equipment, inadequate sampling/testing/reporting, safety issues and lack of operator training. These items should be acted on immediately.

The report also identifies medium risk issues that should be attended to in the short term. These issues include record drawings and manuals, and backup power supplies.

Long term planning objectives have also been identified in the report. These objectives are to ensure that a support structure is put in place to not only bring the facilities into compliance with approved operating standards, but also through operator training, testing and reporting protocols, planning and capital improvements, to maintain that level of operational excellence. This approach will ensure the long term health and safety of both the communities and the operators while also maintaining the value of the capital assets.

Recommendations

The report recommends immediate action be taken on the high risk issues, with attention being given to the medium risk issues. Concurrently, the long term planning issues should be formulated and implemented.

From OCWA's observations in the communities, it is recommended that consideration be given to further studies of the water distribution systems and the sewage collection systems. In addition, the individual water and sewage holding tanks, septic systems, individual wells, and other individual services should also be reviewed on a continuing basis.

The information available through the CAIS and INAC reports was found to be not up to date and/or in agreement. It is recommended that these reports be updated and reconciled.

The foremost recommendation would focus on operator training programs together with a reporting structure to ensure both operating compliance and effective response to changing conditions.