

Mohawks of Akwesasne

First Nation 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.

On June 27 and 28, 2001, a representative from OCWA traveled to 14 facilities within the Mohawks of Akwesasne community and met with three of the eight facility operators.

From interviews with the operators and the completion of questionnaires, information was collected by OCWA and compiled into a Community Report included in Appendix "A". At the time of the visits, walkthrough tours of the facilities were conducted by OCWA, and observations were recorded in the report. This First Nation Report summarizes the findings from the Community Report.

Community Services

The Mohawks of Akwesasne community is located south of Cornwall on Kawehnoke (Cornwall Island), several other small islands in the St. Lawrence River, and along the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total Mohawks of Akwesasne on-reserve population amounts to 7,506, and there are 1,256 houses of which:

- 465 houses (37%) are serviced by a communal water system, 800 houses (63%) are serviced by individual wells or other systems; and
- 369 houses (29%) are serviced by a communal sewage system, and 896 houses (71%) are serviced by individual septic tanks or other systems.

The water treatment facility for the Kanatakon community is a Class II facility. Tsisnaihne, Block 97, Tsisnaihne East, Daycare, Arena and Mohawk of Akwesasne School have Class I water treatment facilities.

The sewage treatment facility for the Akwesasne Mohawk School is a Class II facility. Kanatakon, Tsisnaihne, Block 97, Daycare, and Arena have Class I sewage treatment facilities.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that no Boil Water Advisories had been placed on communal systems visited by OCWA. However, two boil water advisories have been issued on two individual systems, the Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE) administration office and the Traveling College. A UV unit has been ordered for the AMBE system and the Traveling College system is regularly monitored.

There are four communal water systems - Kannatakon (St. Regis), Tsisnaihne (Snye), Block 97, and Tsisnaihne East (Snye East); and three water systems that service individual buildings (Daycare, Arena and Mohawk of Akwesasne School).

There are three communal sewage systems - Kannatakon (St. Regis), Tsisnaihne (Snye), and Block 97; and three sewage systems that service individual buildings (Daycare, Arena, and Akwesasne Mohawk School).

OCWA's assessment identifies the following location to have potential high risk issues:

- Tsisnaihne (Snye) – communal sewage system due to bypass occurrences and effluent exceedances;

Definition of Risk

High risk issues can 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 design and capacity assessments, record drawings and manuals, backup power supplies, lack of main valve operation and maintenance programs, and poor ventilation in the plants.

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 items with attention being given to the medium risk items. Concurrently, the long term planning issues should be formulated and implemented.

From OCWA's observations in the community, 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 holding tanks, septic systems and other service means should also be reviewed on a continuing basis.

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.