

Mushkegowuk Council

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 First Nation communities with regard to the magnitude and scope of existing and potential problems in terms of health and safety risks.

In February 2001, a representative from OCWA traveled to six communities within the Mushkegowuk Council and met with the facility operators. The Tribal Council Technical Services Advisor did not travel with John McGhee (OCWA representative).

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, walkthrough tours of the facilities were conducted by OCWA and observations were recorded in the reports. This Tribal Council Report summarizes the findings from the Community Reports.

Community Services

The Mushkegowuk community is made up of six communities, of which four are located approximately 350 to 550 km north of Timmins, one is located within 90 km of Cochrane, and one is located near Chapleau. Four of the six communities are only accessible by air. Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Mushkegowuk population amounts to 5,099, and there are 1,038 houses of which:

- 1,012 houses (97%) are serviced by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, and 26 houses (3%) are serviced by other systems; and
- 977 houses (94%) are serviced by communal sewage systems, 26 houses (3%) are serviced by individual sewage septic tanks, and 35 houses (3%) have other sewage services.

The water treatment facility in the Attawapiskat community is a Class III facility, and the water treatment facility for the Chapleau Cree is a Class I facility. Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moose Cree, and New Post have Class II water treatment facility.

Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moose Cree, and New Post have Class II sewage treatment facilities.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that one Boil Water Advisory had been placed on the Attawapiskat community.

The Attawapiskat community's existing communal water system is in an alarm situation. Raw water is plugging the filters to the point where it is severely limiting the production of water. The plant is shutdown every night from midnight to 6:00 a.m. to make up enough water for the next day. The current water distribution system is not intended for drinking. Two Culligan units in the plant are producing drinking water for the community.

OCWA's assessment identifies the following locations to have potential high risk issues because of the following:

- Attawapiskat communal water system – Boil Water Advisory;
- Chapleau Cree communal water system – well capacity needed repairs and GCDWQ exceedances;
- Fort Albany communal sewage system – repairs needed and sampling issues;
- Kashechewan communal water system – needed repairs; and
- New Post communal water system – no disinfection and needed equipment repairs.

OCWA's assessment identified the following locations to have potential medium risk issues because of the following:

- Fort Albany communal water system – filter problem and operator training;
- Kashechewan communal sewage system – sampling issues;
- Moose Cree communal water system – capacity and operational problems; and
- New Post communal sewage system – odour issues and berm repairs.

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 design and capacity assessments, 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 septic systems, and other individual systems 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.