

North Shore Tribal 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 March 2001, a representative from OCWA traveled to six of the seven communities within the North Shore Tribal Council (NSTC) and met with the facility operators. At four communities, the Tribal Council Technical Services Advisor was also in attendance. The Ojibway of Batchewana community was not visited by OCWA.

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 seven NSTC communities are generally located along the north shore of Lake Huron between the Cities of Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury. Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site NSTC population amounts to 4,019 and there are 1,237 houses of which:

- 1,110 houses (90%) houses are serviced by communal water systems, including in-ground distribution, 31 houses (2.5%) are serviced by individual wells, and the remaining 96 houses (7.8%) are serviced by other systems; and
- 55 houses (4%) houses are serviced by a communal sewage system with sewage treated by the City of Sault Ste. Marie, 1,025 houses (83%) are reported to be serviced by individual septic tanks, and the remaining 157 houses (13%) have other sewage services.

Garden River, Mississauga, Sagamok Anishnawbek, Thessalon, and Whitefish Lake have Class I water treatment facilities.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that three communities have had Boil Water Advisories issued. Two of the communities currently have a Boil Water Advisory.

OCWA's assessment for Sagamok Anishnawbek, Serpent River Pumphouse #2, and Thessalon identifies the water system to be high risk because of the boil water advisories.

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, backup power supplies, and the proximity of sewage effluent discharges and water intakes.

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 holding tanks, individual wells, 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.