

Toronto Services Centre - Unaffiliated First Nations (South)

Tribal Council Phase II Report - 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.

The OCWA representative, visited 11 of 12 communities of the Toronto Services Centre - Unaffiliated First Nations (South) from February to August 2001. This report summarizes the information gathered, and observations made, at the time of the visits. The Algonquins of Pikwakanagan (Golden Lake) community was not visited.

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 Toronto Services Centre - Unaffiliated First Nations (South) is comprised of 12 communities: the Temagami (Bear Island) community is located 70 km north of Sturgeon Falls; the Nipissing community is located 7 km west of North Bay; the Shawanaga community is located 30 km northwest of Parry Sound; the Wasauksing (Parry Sound) community is located west of Parry Sound; the Weenusk community is located 560 km northwest of Moosonee; the Chippewas of Saugeen and Chippewas of Nawash communities are located 24 to 35 km from Owen Sound; the Ojibways of Hiawatha and Curve Lake communities are located 6 to 14 km from Peterborough; the Mississaugas of the New Credit community is located 16 km southeast of Brantford; the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan (Golden Lake) community is located 30 km south of Pembroke; and the Wahta Mohawk (Gibson) community is located 44 km northwest of Orillia.

Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS May 15, 2000) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Unaffiliated First Nations (South) population amounts to 4,886 and there are 1,962 houses of which:

- 53.6% of the houses are serviced by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, 36% of houses are serviced by individual wells, 0.6% of houses are serviced by water haulage to holding tanks, and the balance of 9.8% of houses are serviced by other means; and
- 9% of houses are serviced by communal sewage systems, 76% of houses are serviced by individual septic tanks, 2% of houses are serviced by individual sewage holding tanks, and the remaining 13% of houses have other sewage services.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that there had been up to four Boil Water Advisories placed on five of the communities in the past year.

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

- Wasauksing (Parry Sound) - communal water system;
- Curve Lake - communal water system;
- Nipissing – 3 out of 9 communal water systems;
- Wahta Mohawk (Gibson) - communal water system; and

The water supply systems are categorized as high risk because of Boil Water Advisories, no chlorination, malfunctioning equipment and other issues.

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 wells, water holding tanks, septic systems 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.