

Wabun 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 late February and early March 2001, a representative from OCWA traveled to the five communities within the Wabun Tribal Council and met with the facility operators, the Tribal Council Technical Advisor in the Matachewan community, and other personnel.

From interviews with the operators and the completion of questionnaires, information was collected by OCWA and compiled into 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

Of the five Wabun communities, two are located within 10 km from the Town of Chapleau, and the remaining three communities are within 100 km from the City of Timmins. Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total Wabun on-site population amounts to 540 and there are 184 houses of which:

- 97% of the houses are serviced by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, and 3% are serviced by individual wells; and
- 100% of houses are serviced by individual septic tanks.

Brunswick House, Chapleau Ojibway, Wahgoshig, Mattagami, and Matachewan have Class I water treatment facilities.

Risk Assessment

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

OCWA's assessment identifies three locations to have potential high risk issues. These communities are high risk mainly due to lack of disinfection on the groundwater source:

- Chapel Ojibway – communal water system;
- Wahgoshig – communal water system; and
- Matachewan – communal water system.

Definition of Risk

High risk issues may include no disinfection or other treatment processes, 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. In addition, 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.