

# Windigo First Nations 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 five of the six communities within the Windigo First Nations Council and met with the facility operators. A site visit of the sixth community was not required because it does not have communal services. At the community visits the Tribal Council Technical Services Advisor was also in attendance.

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

The six Windigo First Nations communities are generally located between 125 and 425 km north of Sioux Lookout and are only accessible by air. Based upon the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Windigo First Nations population amounts to 2,333 and there are 658 houses of which:

- 68% of the houses are served by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, 26% are serviced by water haulage to holding tanks and the balance of 6% are serviced by other means; and
- 57% of houses are serviced by communal sewage systems, 31% are serviced by individual sewage holding tanks, 6% have other sewage service and the remaining 6% are serviced by individual septic tanks.

Cat Lake, Bearskin Lake, Sachigo Lake, New Slate Falls, and North Caribou have Class II water treatment facilities.

Cat Lake, Bearskin Lake, Sachigo Lake, and North Caribou Lake have Class I sewage treatment facilities.

### Risk Assessment

It was reported that up to ten Boil Water Advisories had been placed on the Cat Lake community and one on the North Caribou Lake community during the construction phase of the water treatment plant.

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

- Cat Lake – communal water and sewage systems;
- Bearskin Lake – communal water system;

- Sachigo Lake – communal sewage system; and
- North Caribou Lake – communal water system.

**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 water and sewage 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.