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## Backgrounder

April 10, 2003

### ONTARIO AMENDS WELLS REGULATION

The majority of water quality problems in private wells arise from poor well construction. Failure to properly plug and seal unused wells can also pose a serious threat to ground water quality.

To address these issues, the Ontario government is amending and updating its Wells Regulation (O. Reg. 903). It is strengthening the standards for well construction and decommissioning and setting higher performance standards for well technicians.

These tougher standards make Ontario a leading jurisdiction in North America for well construction. They apply to the construction of all new wells throughout Ontario, and proper abandonment of any well that is not in use including: private wells, municipal wells, farm wells for irrigation and livestock watering, commercial wells, industrial wells, monitoring wells, dewatering wells and test holes.

#### New requirements

Amendments to the regulation affect well technicians and contractors, private and public well owners, groundwater professionals and persons constructing wells. Amendments include:

- Education and training requirements for drillers have been strengthened through mandatory training for new well technicians and mandatory continuing education for licensed well technicians. Ontario is the first province to require continuing education.
- Stronger technical requirements for well construction, including better materials for sealing the space between the well casing and surrounding soil, the use of watertight and continuous casing, and new standards for caps on wells to prevent entry of foreign materials.
- All new wells will be required to have a provincial well tag affixed in a visible location. Tags must also now be buried with decommissioned wells – a first for North America. Since wells are often difficult to locate and to distinguish

from other wells, well tags will ensure the tracking and reporting of well location, status and condition.

- Clear rules for proper decommissioning, including disinfecting the well; filling it in with bentonite or a cement-based sealant; and removal of at least two metres of below-ground casing.
- Reporting, tracking and decommissioning requirements for test holes have been strengthened. Test holes and dewatering wells deeper than three metres are required to be abandoned in accordance with the regulation. Those making test holes and dewatering wells that will stay open longer than 30 days must tag them and submit a well record.

The regulation is posted for 30 days on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry Web Site, found at [http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/env\\_reg/ebr/english](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/env_reg/ebr/english).

## **Wells Regulation Support**

The government has invested \$2.85 million for water wells training, education, outreach and research.

The Ministry of the Environment is providing Sir Sandford Fleming College with a grant of \$600,000 to deliver a Training and Education Program for Persons Constructing Wells. The training will promote compliance with provincial regulations for wells, and promote best management practices for the siting, construction, maintenance, plugging and sealing of wells. The investment will go towards ensuring the training is available at a low cost: \$300 tuition for a 10-day course.

In addition:

- A community-based outreach and education program is being delivered by the Green Communities Association in Peterborough, in partnership with the Ontario Ground Water Association and the Association of Professional Geoscientists of Ontario. The program will inform private well owners about their responsibility under the Wells Regulation and encourage them to maintain and properly abandon unused wells. The program will include water-well stewardship kits, community forums, workshops and one-on-one visits with homeowners.
- The Centre for Research and Technology (CRESTech) has developed the provincial well tagging system and is developing innovative approaches to improve and extend the life of water wells. It has brought together university, government and industry experts to evaluate the state of the province's water well infrastructure and make recommendations for improvement.

These initiatives are part of the government's clean water strategy, a

comprehensive strategy to improve water quality and water delivery in Ontario. They also address Commissioner Dennis O'Connor's recommendations that the Wells Regulation be reviewed and updated if necessary to ensure that it requires best construction practices, and that it provides the public with information about how to supply water safely. The recommendations were contained in O'Connor's Part Two Report of the Walkerton Inquiry.

## **Pilot Project with the City of Ottawa**

The Ontario government is supporting an initiative by the City of Ottawa to allow municipal staff to conduct voluntary inspections of new or modified wells. Ontario will provide \$230,000 for a pilot program to run from June 15, 2003 to January 15, 2004. Under this pilot program, homeowners with new or modified wells within rural sections of the City of Ottawa will be invited to voluntarily sign up for a free well inspection and analysis of water quality.

The pilot project will give the Ministry of the Environment insight into the effectiveness of local well inspection programs as an option for promoting compliance with the government's new wells regulations.

## **Other initiatives**

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, through the Healthy Futures for Ontario Agriculture program, has invested funds to develop the Rural Well Upgrading and Decommissioning Project for rural resident of Ontario (both farm and non-farm). The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is administering this project on behalf of the County Federations. It expires in March 2004.

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