

Plumbers say waters muddied by downloading inspections

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Metroland Staff

Contaminated water could flow from faucets across York Region if

politicians follow through on plans to download plumbing inspections to local municipalities, dozens of plumbers complain. They insist standards will fall

because municipalities won't be able to afford qualified inspectors. Also, each town will apply guidelines differently, leading to a patchwork system.

"The public has the right to a guarantee when they drink water from a faucet, it would be free of contamination," said Dave Hanna, chairperson of the Ontario Backflow Prevention Association.

He said that assurance would be compromised if municipalities looked after inspections. "It would be a regressive step," echoed Sam Morra, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association.

Seventy plumbing contractors and associations wrote letters to the region opposing the move.

But regional chairperson Bill Fisch denied downloading would lead to inferior standards. "There's an assumption (by the plumbers) there would be deficient inspections. I don't hold to that at all."

Georgina Councillor Danny Wheeler pointed out council can still reverse its decision if it's proven passing inspections to municipalities would compromise service. Regional councillors agreed to the plan in principle two months ago during a private retreat at the Briars resort in Georgina. At the same time, they approved creating a regional transit system and fire department services that now lie with local municipalities.

CUPE spokesperson Ron Moreau, representing thousands of unionized regional and municipal employees in York, said handing over plumbing inspections amounted to "throwing municipalities a bone" in exchange for taking over the high-profile transit and fire portfolios.

But more importantly, he believes the municipalities are trying to get their hands on the \$2-million-in annual revenue generated by the region's plumbing inspection branch.

While fire and transit are more visible services to the public, they cost millions of dollars. "I see this (giving municipalities plumbing inspections) as a cash cow," Moreau said.

Regional plumbing inspections made \$2.1 million in revenue last year. So you see, what the incentive might be.

Moreau said York's plumbing inspection system has served as a model across the province, including in the new Toronto mega-city where six departments are being merged.

Brian McCabe, executive vice-president of the Mechanical Contractors Association of Toronto, argued that it makes no sense to create nine new bureaucracies while other governments are consolidating. He pointed out Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Dianne Cunningham has indicated municipalities should amalgamate or risk having the province doing it for them.

"It appears that one way or another in the near future, there will be amalgamation of municipalities within the Region of York," McCabe said.

"It is our opinion that the Region of York would be served best by a regional building inspection department, providing one-stop shopping for both contractors and homeowners at a regional level."

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