

# Walkerton must be wake-up call to anyone who drinks water

The water crisis in Walkerton could prove to be the best wake-up call we've ever had.

Water is dull stuff until it's poisoned or gone. Up until now, we took water for granted. As well, we ignored, underestimated and undermined the keepers of water. With bad water killing seven and making about 1,000 sick in Walkerton, we have much more respect for water.

Government officials are busy these days. They're diving for cover, scrambling for answers, directing their spin doctors to put a positive slant on the crisis. And of course, the finger of blame is being pointed at the other guy. Meanwhile, Walkerton buries its dead, tends to its sick and hopes the likes of this tragedy will never grace the town's doorstep again.

In York Region, government officials are assuring everyone that an E. coli outbreak could never happen here. I'm not convinced. Instead of taking a can-do approach, I'd prefer they never say never. One thing is certain: If the keepers of our water aren't considered Very Important Persons (VIPs), they are now.

While we have an excellent system in York Region, it's not perfect. Here's the drill: Water samples are sent weekly by the region and by local municipalities to a lab owned by York and Durham regions.

If equipment designed to detect chlorine in the water finds levels have fallen below one to 1.5 parts per million, indicating there's more bacteria than the



Joan Ransberry

chlorine is capable of killing, an alarm system is triggered, immediately shutting down the facility providing water.

I have to ask, How do we know the system will be shut down? How do we know officials will be called? And how do we know the called-in officials will act on the crisis? Since people have been known to sweep bad things under the carpet and go on to hope it all blows over, it's all very difficult to trust.

Of the 4,900 water tests carried out in York Region last year, we're told none showed a presence of E. coli. I didn't hear of any deaths or serious illness linked to germ-ridden water, so I can only assume this is true.

Apparently, if any problems are detected, information is provided to works department officials, who immediately alert the public health unit. It should be noted, the same system was in place in Walkerton. The catch was, the information wasn't given to health

authorities. Now that about 1,000 have fallen sick and some have died, everybody's asking, 'Why?'

We've got to stop assuming all is well. Yes, the great majority of people in charge of important things are good at what they do. But not everyone is. Some government officials don't have the sense to come in out of the rain. Some have been bullied for so long, they can no longer function properly; others are just lazy, while a few are morally bankrupt. These are the ones we have to watch. These are the ones who can put our lives in jeopardy.

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Application for a Sale Licence  
Markham Peking House  
3255 Highway #7 East, Unit 1-A, Markham

Any resident of the municipality may make written submission as to whether the issuance of the licence is in the public interest having regard to the needs and wishes of the residents. Submissions must be received no later than June 30, 2000. Please include your name, address and telephone number. If a petition is submitted to the Commission, please identify the designated contact person.

Note: The AGCO gives the applicant details of any objections.

Submissions to be sent to:  
Licensing and Registration Department  
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