

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY LAUNCHED MASSIVE INSPECTION PROGRAM ACROSS PROVINCE

# Water supply safe, regional official insists

BY PATRICK CASEY  
Staff Writer

Although Ontario's Environment Ministry has uncovered deficiencies at 131 provincial water treatment plants, a York Region official insists the region's vast water supply is safe for local residents.

In the wake of the recent Walkerton water tragedy — which killed six people and made a number of residents ill in the southwestern Ontario community following the presence of the deadly E. coli bacteria in its water system — Queen's Park has launched a massive inspection program across the province.

In a report released late last month, ministry representatives have completed inspections of 241 of the province's 630 water treatment plants and discovered problems at 131 of them.

The remaining plants will be tested by the end of the year.

However, Bruce Macgregor, York's director of water and wastewater, said his staff conducted extensive self-assessments at all the

region's treatment plants in June and sent them to the ministry.

"We reported to the ministry and we haven't heard anything back from them. I fully expect to have heard back if there were any problems," said Macgregor last week, explaining the region draws water from three different sources.

"The ministry has a limited set of resources they are drawing on and they are targeting the suspected areas first. We have volunteered some of our resources to assist them, but we will be hearing from them. I was less surprised to see several municipalities were falling short of adequate tests, but very surprised to see inadequate chlorination. That is paramount to having clean water.

"We have a very reliable source of water, with a low level of risk," said Macgregor, adding all water is treated with bacteria-killing chlorine.

Residents in Aurora, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury draw their water from deep underground aquifers, while Georgina receives treated water from Lake Simcoe.

The region has committed \$30 million to construct a new Lake Simcoe facility that should be in service by 2002, replacing a plant built in 1958.

Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan residents are supplied with water from the City of Toronto, which treats water taken from Lake Ontario before sending it to York's southern municipalities.

And more than 12 municipal wells supply water to people living in smaller communities, such as King City, Mount Albert and Stouffville. But more than 50,000 regional homeowners rely on private wells for water.

In 74 Ontario plants, inspectors found an insufficient number of chemical or bacteriological samples being taken and analysed, and 29 plants had not adequately maintained their disinfectant equipment, with either no alarms to signal a chlorination failure or no back-up system in the event of such a failure.

At another 24 treatment plants, groundwater was not being chlorinated or surface water was not treated, while in 24 cases, plant

operators were not certified by the ministry or had inadequate training.

Environment Minister Dan Newman said the provincial government will continue to take tough action to make sure that Ontario's drinking water is clean and safe.

*'We also have the financial resources in place to fix things...'*

"(These results) are not good enough," slammed Newman. "I am determined to make water treatment facilities in the province conform to the highest standards."

Beginning in June, the inspections are part of a three-step action plan to safeguard community drinking water.

For the first round of inspections, ministry officials went to treatment plants that had failed previous tests. Other steps include the introduction of new rules to protect drinking water, as well as a

review of all certificates of approval for municipal water works.

In cases where there is failure to comply with a field order, the ministry can take action that includes prosecution under the Ontario Water Resources Act.

Nearly a decade ago, the provincial government removed itself from the water business, electing to become a regulatory watchdog instead of operators of the various facilities.

But Macgregor admits the region has a decided advantage over much smaller communities, thanks to a \$817-million operating budget this year that includes nearly \$502 million in reserves, a AAA credit rating and \$125 million throughout the year to help deliver, treat and maintain 100 million cubic metres of water and wastewater.

"We are better resourced here in York Region, there is no question about it," he said. "We have a variety of plants we operate and our people are very skilled."

"We also have the financial resources in place to fix things, if needed."

**LEADERS WANTED**  
Girl Guides of Canada  
Guides du Canada  
Call for Details:  
1-800-565-8111  
This message brought to you as a community service of The Economist/Sun.

**Exclusively Aerobics**  
Stouffville  
New is September  
Yoga & Print  
also Babysitting  
For information  
Call  
905-887-1248

GENERAL & COSMETIC DENTISTRY  
FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY  
**MODERN DENTISTRY**  
TRADITIONAL CARE  
Dr. Ken Lawlor  
including  
Orthodontics for Children & Adults  
Jaw Joint / TMJ Treatment  
905-475-7600  
18 Crown Steel Drive  
(Warden & 14th Avenue)  
Electronic, Insurance, Filing.

**COURT AUTHORIZED LIQUIDATION SALE**  
designer fashion event  
**LADIES CLOTHING**  
UP TO **75% OFF**  
**ALL SHORTS IN THE STORE**  
orig. to \$69.99  
**NOW \$15**  
**ALL TOPS & BLOUSES**  
orig. to \$69.99  
**NOW \$20**  
**ALL SKIRTS IN THE STORE**  
evening, casual, summer, business  
orig. to \$89.99  
**NOW \$25**  
**ALL PANTS IN THE STORE**  
evening, casual, summer, business  
orig. to \$99.99  
**NOW \$25**  
**ALL DRESSES IN THE STORE**  
evening, casual, summer, business  
**NOW \$35**  
**ALL BLAZERS & JACKETS**  
orig. to \$149.99  
**NOW \$45**  
**ALL COATS IN THE STORE**  
evening, casual, summer, business  
orig. to \$295.00  
**NOW \$75**  
Markham 330 Esna Park Drive  
Woodbridge 100 Marycroft, Unit 1  
Toronto 1375 Yonge Street  
Tue Aug 8...10-6  
Wed Aug 9...10-6  
Thur Aug 10...10-8  
Fri Aug 11...10-8  
Sat Aug 12...10-5  
Terms: Cash, Debit, Visa, Mastercard  
www.CENTURY SERVICES INC. com  
AUCTIONEERS • LIQUIDATORS • APPRAISERS

**Atlantic Canada**  
Join the thousands of delighted DeNure travellers who have discovered the Maritimes with DeNure Tours over the past 40 years. Tour Ottawa, Quebec City, PEI, Cape Breton Island, Halifax, the Cabot Trail, Cavendish Beach, Peggy's Cove, Lunenburg. 15 days \$1795 twin plus GST/HST. Sept. 2, 10, 16.  
DeNure Tours  
1-800-668-6859  
DeNure Tours Ltd. 71 Mount Hope St.,  
Lindsay, ON www.denuretours.com #21032991

**QUINCY'S RESTAURANT**  
Quincy's is Featuring  
Friday Night Italian Buffet \$9.95  
Saturday Night Chicken & Ribs Buffet \$10.95  
Children 12 & under 1/2 Price  
Under 4 free  
Call For Your Reservation  
905-474-0444  
Ext. 4530  
Holiday Inn HOTEL & SUITES  
(805) 474-0444  
7095 Woodbine Avenue,  
Markham, Ontario L3R 1A3