

# New water rules won't change York test methods

Region is already meeting testing requirements

BY PATRICK CASEY  
Staff Writer

New provincial regulations for municipal water treatment and distribution systems, including \$240 million to upgrade aging treatment plants in rural communities, will mean little change for operators of facilities in York Region.

The provincial government has announced new rules requiring frequent testing of water samples, stringent treatments and the release of quarterly water quality reports for the 630 Ontario water treatment plants.

Micro-biological and chemical testing must also be conducted by accredited laboratories, while unsafe drinking water must be reported immediately to the Environment Ministry, local medical health officer and waterworks owner.

However, Greater Toronto municipalities do not qualify for the two-year, \$240-million upgrade fund, the Tories already set aside in this year's budget for infrastructure programs for small towns and rural communities.

Instead, Ontario hopes to finalize an agreement with the federal government to provide funding under a new infrastructure program.

## REPORTING SYSTEM

"It's not a huge change for us," Bruce Macgregor, York Region's director of water and waste water, said. "All of the testing requirements we are meeting now in an accredited laboratory, so there is nothing new as far as those regulations go."

The real change in the regulations is we have to make our reporting a little clearer. It will be different because we now keep information in the form we receive it from the lab because it was really intended to be reviewed by water-quality experts and people in the business.

"But we can handle it all in stride with no fundamental changes."

According to Macgregor, the region already tests 5,000 water samples each year, with the results analysed at the Dufferin Creek

Water Pollution Control Plant, located at the end of the York Durham Sewage System in Durham Region.

Another 12,000 samples are collected by local municipalities across the region, while Toronto studies 24,000 water samples annually — an important figure considering York Region currently receives 75 per cent of its water from Toronto.

"Obviously, there is a lot of quality water control going on," said Macgregor.

Calling the upgrades the toughest regulations in Canada, Ontario Premier Mike Harris and his government are paying close attention to provincial water quality after six people died and many more fell ill in Walkerton following the contamination of the town's drinking water earlier this year.

## PUBLIC INQUIRY

A public inquiry into the tragedy is to begin this fall.

In a provincial report released last month, inspections of 241 of the province's 630 water treatment plants discovered problems at 131 of them. The remaining plants will be tested by the end of the year.

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

Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill 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, but more than 50,000 homeowners in the region still rely on private wells.

Meanwhile, by October, York Region will begin providing extensive water-quality information and sample test results on its website, not only to follow provincial requirements, but also to help alleviate concerns local homeowners may have about their water supply.

"Small water systems are not meeting certain standards and these regulations are targeted specifically at them," added Macgregor.

"Reporting is a good process to follow."



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Virginia Elliott, 8, and sister Lorena, 12, throw recyclables on the curb in a light blue transparent bag, while mom Mio Elliott and neighbour Bob Mansour look on.

## Markham neighbourhood likes its blue-bag recycling program

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

Got blue-box blues? Try blue bags.

Bob Mansour switched to bags two months ago and he likes it.

Mansour lives in a part of Markham where 600 households are testing a recycling scheme that, if it spreads through York Region, could one day see the familiar blue boxes vanish from our porches and lawns.

At Mansour's curb on Reesorville Road, beside his dark-green bags of garbage and clear bags of yard waste, were three blue bags bulging with recyclables and three bright green bags of organic kitchen waste.

"This is the future you're looking at here," he declared.

After two months of the six-month project, Mansour and neighbour Mio Elliott like the convenience of dropping mingled recyclables outside and not having to retrieve a plastic box later.

Elliott would appreciate blue bags in the winter "because I don't like the cold and I don't like the snow."

She added she no longer has to worry about backing over a box in

her driveway.

Blue boxes won't be taken away, promised Regional Councillor Gord Landon, chairperson of the region's solid waste strategy committee. Though Landon acknowledged residents' deep loyalty to the boxes, he wants all York municipalities to see the results with bags.

One possible snag is that the translucent bags (both green and blue) would not be provided free, as they have been during the Markham pilot.

"I don't know if it will be successful if people have to pay for it," Elliott admitted.

Mansour had no such doubts over the cost of bags.

"Sixty cents a week? I mean, hello! This is an affluent neighbourhood."

He had filled the translucent greens with kitchen waste — corn cobs, bread, chicken bones, stuff he would have dropped into the garbage before.

Landon admitted only about 20 per cent of households in the test area are putting out kitchen waste bags.

"We've got summer students out there, trying to bring that number up."

Bagged kitchen waste, should the program spread, would be brought to a central composter for the region. The compost would then be sold to nurseries, golf courses and residents, Landon said.

Northumberland County started an optional blue bag program in 1996 and stopped selling blue boxes to residents last year.

"Looks like we're seeing about half and half now," said Mary Little, plant manager at the Northumberland Material Recovery Facility.

"People with families prefer the bag system because you can get a lot more in a bag."

Next month, testing for another waste collection option may get under way in Markham.

Homes in the test area will get a "split-cart" container to put their waste on the curb.

The plastic carts, divided half and half for regular garbage and recyclables, will be collected by trucks with articulated arms.

Landon said the carts had worked well in some United States communities.

"The seniors (in California) had no problems wheeling them out."



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