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# Region may police rural water quality

BY ROY GREEN  
 Staff Writer

York Region may soon be overseeing the quality of drinking water in as many as 1,000 rural churches, commu-

nity centres, restaurants and small business operations.

A report this week from the Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality says churches, trailer parks and bed and breakfasts are facing expensive

retrofits trying to keep up with costly water regulations imposed in the wake of the Walkerton disaster.

Regulations introduced in 2003 compel small businesses to build expensive new drinking water systems

and ensure routine testing, even if there had never been a problem with their water.

The new rules followed the E. coli contamination of Walkerton's municipal water supply in May 2000, an outbreak that killed seven people and left 2,500 others ill.

This week's report says these small organizations should have their individual risk assessed by local public health officers, who will then tailor a specific water-protection plan for each.

A preliminary estimate shows there are at least 700 such properties in the region, according to Helen Doyle, manager of environmental health for the region's health services department.

"We would need to do a proper audit, but the number of restaurants, community centres, gas stations and seasonal operations like camps and cabins could be more than 1,000," Ms Doyle said.

"These are locations with private wells, not on municipal water systems."

*The new rules followed the E. coli contamination of Walkerton's municipal water supply in May 2000, an outbreak that killed seven people and left 2,500 others ill.*

The inspectors would determine if specific locations require a treatment system or might be considered low risk, meaning only regular sampling of water quality.

There have already been discussions with the Health Ministry on the issue, Ms Doyle said, and she believes additional public health inspections would be funded by the province.

"The rationale for us doing it is our health inspectors are in many of these places anyway."

Taking the onus off small business is a good idea, but only if Ontario provides more money, King Township Mayor Margaret Black said.

"The fact that it's costing us a lot more money since Walkerton is not necessarily a bad thing, but we need the resources to do this," she said.

Environment Minister Leona Dombrowsky called for the report because many small operators reported having trouble complying with the rules.

Some simply shut down while others told people to stop drinking the water because they couldn't comply with the rules.

A draft version of revised legislation is expected by the end of June.



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