



Minister's Annual Report on Drinking Water 2017

Read an overview of our programs, policies and initiatives to protect drinking water in Ontario, including protecting water and the Great Lakes, helping improve drinking water for Indigenous communities and safeguarding Ontario's drinking water.

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Minister's message

As your newly appointed Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, I am pleased to share my first and the ministry's 11th annual report on Ontario's drinking water.

We are working with Indigenous communities, federal and municipal governments and local communities across Ontario, to help protect drinking water at its source in lakes and streams all the way to our taps.

From Ontario's strict health-based drinking water standards to comprehensive legislation that protects water sources, we provide a safety net that helps ensure the quality and safety of our drinking water. The numbers support it too — 99.8% of more than 517,000 test results from municipal residential drinking water systems meet Ontario's strict drinking water quality standards.

A significant achievement, but we know there is more work to be done.

Climate change is warming our lakes and contributing to more blue-green algal blooms across the province. Communities are experiencing more frequent and severe weather events leading to overflows of sewage systems into lakes and rivers. And as of September 30, 2017, 22 of the 133 First Nation communities have long-term drinking water advisories in place.

We are taking action on climate change to help manage the effects it is having on our water resources while ensuring people in Ontario continue to have access to clean and safe drinking water now and in the future.

Last December, Ontario placed a two-year moratorium on all new and expanded groundwater takings for water bottling. This year, we introduced stricter rules for bottled water permit renewals and implemented an additional fee for water bottlers for every million litres of groundwater taken.

In March 2017, Ontario and Canada posted the draft Lake Erie action plan for public comment — an important step towards achieving a 40% reduction in phosphorus levels by 2025 to protect the lake from harmful blue-green algal blooms. We are working with key sectors and communities to finalize actions, based on comments received, in order to have the final action plan in place by February 2018.

Ontario is working with First Nations and the federal government to help improve drinking water on reserves. The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change provides support for First Nation communities, tribal councils and political territorial organizations to access provincial in-kind technical resources and expertise. Ontario has committed \$1.85 million for the delivery of training programs, in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, to support First Nation drinking water system operators, management and community leaders.

We are working with municipalities, government ministries and agencies, conservation authorities, businesses and others on implementing source protection plans, which help safeguard the sources of nearly 450 municipal drinking water systems in a geographic area that covers 95% of Ontario's population.

Access to clean and safe drinking water is important for every Ontarian and a priority for our government. In July 2017, we strengthened protection for children from lead in drinking water in schools and child care centres by updating requirements for sampling, flushing and corrective action. This ensures that every fountain or tap serving drinking water or for the preparation of food will be sampled for lead and protected.

I look forward to working with our partners over the year ahead to fight climate change and protect and improve the health of all water sources.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Chris Ballard

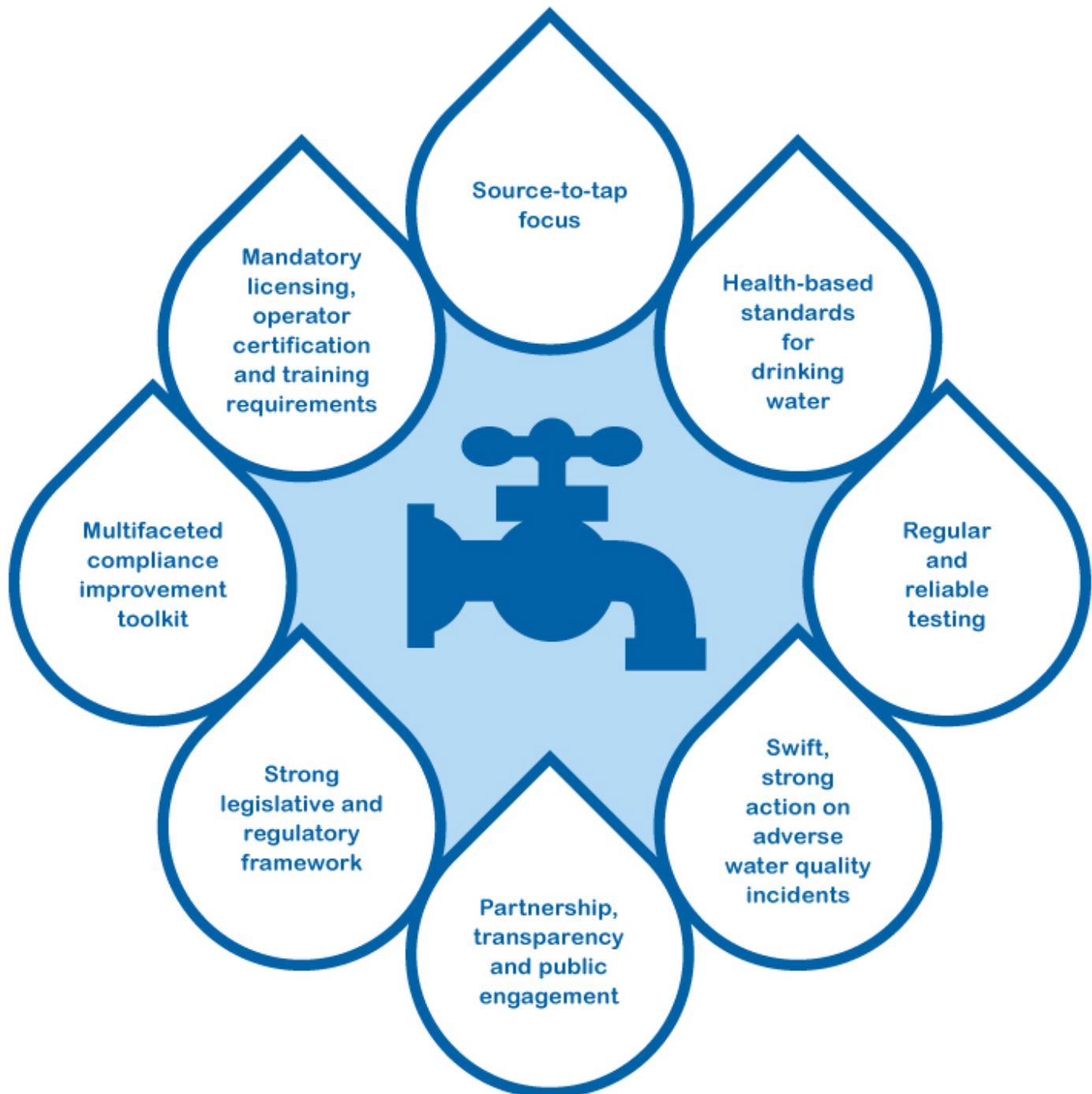
Minister of the Environment and Climate

Change Government of Ontario

Ontario's drinking water safety net

Ontario's drinking water remains among the best protected in the world. From our health-based drinking water standards to comprehensive legislation that protects water from source to tap, we provide a safety net that helps ensure Ontarians can be confident in the quality and safety of their drinking water.

Figure 1: Ontario's drinking water safety net



Protecting water and the Great Lakes

Protecting groundwater

As impacts from climate change and population growth become more prevalent, Ontario is protecting water and building a better understanding of the science to further that protection.

As part of the province's plan to [strengthen groundwater protection](#) for future generations, Ontario:

- Placed a two-year moratorium on all new and expanded permits to take water from groundwater sources for water bottling. This moratorium will be in place until January 1, 2019.
- Introduced [stricter rules](#) for renewals of existing water taking permits for bottled water in April 2017. The new rules will increase public reporting and transparency related to these water takings and enhance scientific requirements for making decisions on renewal applications.
- Began charging water bottling companies \$500 for every million litres of groundwater taken on August 1, 2017, in addition to the \$3.71 they already pay. The new fee will help recover costs to manage this vital resource, including supporting scientific research on the environmental impacts associated with taking groundwater for water bottling and enhanced data analysis.
- Engaged Indigenous communities, industry and other communities on changes to water quality management practices.

In addition, water budgets that take into account climate change and growth are being used when permits to take water are reviewed. Water budgets are science-based tools that evaluate the sustainability of a municipal drinking water source. Where a source of drinking water is at risk, a water budget is used to identify activities that may be contributing to the risk. These risks can then be managed.

Source water protection

Protecting our local drinking water sources — both groundwater and surface water — is the first step in Ontario's comprehensive multi-barrier approach to providing safe drinking water to Ontarians.

Across the province, municipalities, ministries and others are implementing source protection plans. Together, these plans are helping protect the sources of nearly 450 municipal drinking water systems in a geographic area that covers 95% of Ontario's population.

Progress towards implementing source protection plans

Source protection plans contain a series of locally developed policies that reduce the risks to existing and future sources of municipal drinking water. Municipalities, Ontario ministries and agencies, conservation authorities, the farming community and others such as federal agencies, public health units and businesses are responsible for implementing these policies and reporting yearly on their progress.

This year, three source protection authorities — Lakehead, Mattagami and Niagara — provided annual progress reports. In all cases, progress was made on addressing significant risks to local sources of drinking water. For example:

- Lakehead reported the Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge prepared a salt management plan to ensure no salt is applied and no salt or snow is stored in a vulnerable area.
- Mattagami reported Porcupine Health Unit inspected three on-site sewage systems in accordance with the Ontario Building Code and found all systems to be functioning as designed.
- Niagara reported Niagara Region, City of Thorold, City of Niagara Falls and City of Port Colborne have integrated source protection requirements into municipal land use planning and building permits.

Municipalities are also making progress toward source protection plan implementation by updating land use maps to show the locations of vulnerable drinking water areas and to provide more information about source protection to the public and those that have to take action to address potential threats to drinking water.

Ontario also extended grant funding agreements to March 31, 2018, to allow municipalities to continue to use funds from the Source Protection Municipal Implementation Fund towards source protection plan implementation. Since 2013, this fund provided more than \$14 million to nearly 200 small, rural municipalities to implement source protection policies that address significant threats to their drinking water sources.

To learn more about local source protection plans or progress reports for your area, visit [Conservation Ontario](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministers-annual-report-drinking-water-2017#section-0).

Continuous improvement of source protection

In spring 2017, Ontario amended technical rules used to develop science-based assessment reports that form part of the source protection plans. These amendments provide source protection authorities with flexibility to consider local conditions. For example, authorities are now able to identify drinking water systems in large water bodies, such as the Great Lakes and connecting channels, as more vulnerable to contamination. In March, Ontario also made improvements to its [Source Water Protection Information Atlas](#) on Ontario.ca. This map provides a provincewide view of more than 970 wellhead protection areas and 150 intake protection zones. It was updated to include parcel property boundaries, improved access to source protection policies and enhanced functionality, such as improved search and help functions. It is useful to anyone involved in land purchases or planners who have responsibilities to protect municipal drinking water sources.

At the provincial level, government ministries that issue approvals that could affect drinking water sources use the atlas to screen new and existing approvals for potential source water protection implications.

Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes

Ontario continues to engage Ontarians in the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes Guardians' Council

The [Great Lakes Guardians' Council](#) established under the *Great Lakes Protection Act* and co-chaired by Grand Council Chief Patrick Madahbee and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, provides a forum for Great Lakes ministers, First Nation and Métis representatives, partners and stakeholders to identify and discuss priorities for protecting and restoring the Great Lakes.

At the third council meeting held in May 2017, participants discussed potential actions related to Lake Erie that key communities and sectors are considering. Participants also discussed the importance of youth engagement in Great Lakes protection and restoration efforts and this year's Mother Earth Water Walk and the great work of Elder and Grandmother Josephine Mandamin.

Great Lakes student conferences

Since 2014, the ministries of Education and Environment and Climate Change have brought together school boards, conservation authorities and other partners to host Great Lakes student conferences. These conferences have provided secondary school students the opportunity to learn from professionals whose careers relate to the Great Lakes, including those involved in source water protection, drinking water and waste water operations.

In 2017, approximately 800 students and their teachers travelled to their respective Great Lakes' shorelines to participate in these day-long events, hearing from speakers and taking part in experiential learning opportunities that built their understanding of how upstream activities on the land have downstream impacts on water quality. Since the inception of the program, 2,400 students have taken part.

Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund

Communities continue to take local actions to help protect and improve the health of the Great Lakes, supported by the [Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund](#).

Since 2012, the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund has provided \$7.5 million to 375 projects. Achievements include planting more than 285,000 trees and shrubs and the release of more than 800,000 native fish. Besides benefitting the Great Lakes, many of the projects have increased buffers along streams to reduce stormwater and nutrient loading, while engaging communities and youth in citizen science activities.

Some of the [projects that received funding](#) include:

- Love your Lake! Lake Ontario Litter Cleanup by A Greener Future: local residents joined in large-scale cleanups of Lake Ontario's shoreline and were educated about the impacts of litter. The results of each cleanup were shared on social media. The project was successful in continuing the cleanup, with litter cleanup events planned to take place in 100 locations.
- Ojibway Park Shoreline Restoration and Wetland Preservation by Garden River First Nation: based along the St. Mary's River, this project protected shoreline and wetland habitats by examining invasive species, as well as species at risk, mapping shoreline and wetlands environments, constructing a new field station, installing interpretive signage, and creating a Guardian Program to teach participants about the natural environment.
- European Water Chestnut Removal in the Rideau River by Scouts Canada: this project targeted the removal of invasive water chestnut plants from the Rideau River while providing an opportunity for youth from the 23rd Nepean Geohunters Scout Troop to plan, organize, implement and review an environmental project in their community.

Ontario has committed to provide \$1.5 million in funding to 70 projects in 2017 led by not-for-profit organizations, schools, Indigenous communities and other local groups.

Ontario Community Environment Fund

Ontario collects environmental penalties when specific regulated industrial facilities spill or have unlawful discharges to water or land. These monetary penalties are reinvested through the [Ontario Community Environment Fund](#) to support local environmental improvement projects in the same watersheds where the violations occurred.

Not-for-profit organizations, Indigenous communities, schools, municipalities and conservation authorities can apply for grants through the fund to support community-based environmental remediation projects, capacity building to prevent or manage spills and environmental research, education and outreach activities.

In 2016, [20 projects](#) in 13 watersheds were awarded a total of \$314,000. Their actions protect local watersheds, help fight climate change and protect the Great Lakes.

Since 2016, Ontario Community Environment Fund grant recipients have included:

- Water First Education and Training Inc., which received grants to help improve drinking water in 9 Ontario First Nation communities by involving local youth in water-science workshops, tree planting and stream restoration activities in the Central Abitibi, Goulais, Little Pic, Montreal, Spanish, Sydenham Upper Groundhog and Whitefish watersheds.
- The Rural Lambton Stewardship Network, which received grants for two projects to divert 500 acres of agricultural runoff from flowing into the St. Clair River. Combined, the 2 projects resulted in the creation of 5 acres of wetland, the planting of 10 acres of tallgrass prairie, 3.5 acres of trees and shrubs and 2,250 native wetland plants.

Protecting Ontario's drinking water sources from blue-green algal blooms

As reported last year, the presence of harmful algal blooms in Ontario's waterways is an emerging issue and one Ontario continues to take action on to protect this precious resource.

Blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, occur naturally in lakes and rivers, forming blooms that can appear as surface scum and, in some cases, produce toxins. Human activities that add more nutrients — such as the use of fertilizer near shorelines or not properly maintaining septic systems — along with our warming climate can make the problem worse.

The number of blue-green algal blooms reported each year in Ontario can vary. As of August 15, 2017, there were 16 confirmed blue-green algal blooms reported for 2017. In 2016, the ministry confirmed 51 blooms.

Ontario is committed to protecting its water bodies from blue-green algae. Our [12-Point Action Plan](#) outlines how Ontario works with municipalities, local medical officers of health and other partners to prevent and respond to blue-green algal blooms in the Great Lakes and other lakes and rivers that impact drinking water.

Municipalities proactively monitor their sources of water to better detect the potential for harmful algal blooms. Scientists have identified approximately 100 variants of algal microcystins. Studies indicate that microcystin-LR is the most toxic variant examined. Microcystin-LR has never been detected in treated Ontario drinking water. Municipal drinking water systems use rigorous and proactive monitoring plans to ensure early detection of potentially harmful algal blooms. The drinking water systems have the necessary technology to ensure the effective removal of algal toxins and they regularly test treated drinking water to ensure that it is safe for distribution to the community.

Canada-Ontario Draft Action Plan for Lake Erie

Of all of the Great Lakes, Lake Erie is the most susceptible to algal blooms — the harmful kind, like blue-green algae, and the nuisance kind — which can cause drinking water to taste and smell foul and clog drinking water intakes.

There is scientific consensus between Canada and the United States that phosphorus is the primary nutrient that needs to be reduced to address algae problems in Lake Erie.

With the assistance of many partners, Ontario and Canada have developed a draft action plan for Lake Erie to reduce algal blooms and phosphorus loads in the lake.

This draft action plan was posted for review and comment on the Environmental Registry on March 10, 2017, and includes 76 Canada-Ontario-led proposed actions grouped broadly into 5 categories:

- Reduce phosphorous at its source
- Ensure effective policies, programs and legislation
- Improve knowledge
- Educate and build awareness
- Strengthen leadership and coordination

The draft action plan was consulted on broadly with the Great Lakes community, including First Nation and Métis communities, key sectors, including municipal and agricultural, and the public. It is currently being refined based on feedback. A final plan is expected to be released no later than February 2018.

In addition, in 2016, Ontario posted its early actions on Lake Erie, and established a target under the Great Lakes Protection Act for a 40% phosphorus load reduction by 2025 (from 2008 levels) for the western and central basins of Lake Erie, as well as an aspirational interim goal of 20% reduction by 2020 to address algal blooms.

The final Lake Erie action plan is expected to be in place by February 2018.

Learn more about the [Canada-Ontario Draft Action Plan for Lake Erie](#).

Other actions to combat blue-green algae

Ontario is increasing its understanding of blue-green algae through a number of other activities, including:

- A multi-watershed nutrient study to assess the interaction between agricultural land use and phosphorus loading in the Great Lakes basin. This multi-year study, expected to be completed in 2020, will assess the scope of change in agricultural phosphorus loadings and make recommendations on reduction and management options for the Great Lakes.
- A study to assess the water quality of Lake St. Clair and how discharges from the Thames River are contributing to the extent, occurrence and magnitude of wide-spread algal blooms.
- A monitoring buoy that was deployed in 2016 on Three Mile Lake in the Muskoka area to collect data will be used to investigate how different factors contribute to the onset, timing, duration and composition of algal blooms in the lake. Monitoring will continue over the next few years.

Reducing municipal wastewater discharges

With climate change, communities across the province are experiencing more frequent and severe weather events. When these events happen, rain water can enter the sewage collection system, causing bypasses and overflows of raw or partially treated sewage into lakes and rivers. Ontario is working with its municipal partners to monitor and take action to reduce such incidents.

When a bypass or overflow happens, municipalities are required to notify both the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change and the local Medical Officer of Health.

Kingston and Toronto are also reporting bypasses and overflows to the public. Kingston Utilities has a map that allows its residents to see, in real time, where there has been a sewage bypass or overflow. The City of Toronto is piloting using its [@311Toronto](#) Twitter account to notify its residents when a wastewater plant bypass starts and stops. With this information, residents can make informed decisions about whether to use a waterway or not.

The ministry is committed to transparency and believes Ontarians should be made aware of potential impacts to water quality following storms. It is working with municipalities to improve timely reporting of information on sewage bypasses and overflows.

Progress on protecting Lake Simcoe

The [Lake Simcoe Protection Act](#) and the [Lake Simcoe Protection Plan](#) provide a framework for Ontario and its partners to work together to improve and protect the health of the Lake Simcoe watershed.

On July 27, 2017, the [2016 Minister's Annual Report](#) on Lake Simcoe was released. This report highlights actions taken over the past year, including:

- The completion of all sub-watershed plans and water budget studies that guide protection of water quality and quantity in key areas of the Lake Simcoe watershed.
- Efforts to reduce the amount of salt going into Lake Simcoe, including mapping areas vulnerable to salt, ongoing monitoring of salt levels, training for salt applicators and better designed parking lots that reduce the amount of salt needed.

Helping improve drinking water for Indigenous communities

While the federal government is responsible for the provision of safe drinking water on reserves, the province is committed to working with Indigenous communities and the federal government to help ensure First Nation reserves have sustainable access to safe drinking water, with a focus on communities experiencing drinking water advisories for more than 1 year.

The province sits on a trilateral steering committee made up of representatives from Chiefs of Ontario, political territorial organizations, the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada footnote 1 [1] and Health Canada. This committee was established in September 2016 and is implementing a plan to eliminate long-term drinking water advisories at public federally funded systems in First Nation communities within 5 years — by end of March 2021. In November 2015, there were 48 long-term drinking water advisories affecting 26 First Nation communities. Since the work of the trilateral steering committee began, 7 long-term drinking water advisories in 6 communities have been lifted, and another 2 advisories in 2 communities have been added to the list, leaving 43 long-term drinking water advisories in place in 22 communities as of September 30, 2017.

Ontario has a single window for First Nation communities, tribal councils and political territorial organizations to access the technical resources and expertise available within the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, upon request.

Ontario has also committed \$1.85 million for the delivery of training programs to support First Nation drinking water system operators, management and community leaders. An agreement to deliver operator training and certification was signed in May 2017 among the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation, the Keewatinook Centre of Excellence, located in Dryden, and the Walkerton Clean Water Centre. The training programs are scheduled to start in fall 2017 with a focus on communities with long-term drinking water advisories.

The province and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada have also entered into an agreement with Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation to develop toolkits and training resources to support source water and watershed protection initiatives in First Nation communities. The Institute of Watershed Science, located at Trent University in Peterborough, has been retained to develop these materials. Ontario and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada have each committed \$100,000 towards this multi-year initiative.

In addition to the work of this ministry, the Ministry of Infrastructure, in partnership with Infrastructure Canada, administers the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund to municipalities and First Nations in Ontario. As announced on October 10, 2017, approximately \$2.7 million in provincial funding has been committed to 144 drinking water projects in 91 First Nation communities (including 14 communities with long-term drinking water advisories).

Safeguarding Ontario's drinking water

Enhancing protection of children from lead in drinking water

Ontario has the most stringent testing regime in the entire country and is the only province that requires lead testing in drinking water from all schools and child care centres. It has continued its leadership on protecting children from lead in drinking water by proactively updating its rules for schools and child care centres. As of July 1, 2017, schools and child care centres in Ontario are required to test all fountains and drinking water taps in their facilities by prescribed timelines. As well, if a sample result exceeds the standard, immediate action would need to be taken until the issue is resolved. These strengthened lead testing requirements will ensure every water tap serving drinking water to children in schools and child care centres is sampled for lead.

Since 2007, Ontario has required schools and child care centres to address potential sources of lead in drinking water by sampling at least one tap in their facility for lead annually and to flush out their plumbing on a regular basis, either daily or weekly depending on risk factors.

The provincial test results of drinking water samples taken after flushing from schools and child care centres have been encouraging. In 2016-17, 98% of flushed samples from schools and child care centres had lead levels below the Ontario Drinking Water Quality Standard. These results show an improvement over the first year of sampling in 2007-08 where 94% of school and child care centre flushed samples met the standard.

In addition to these new sampling requirements, amendments were made to recognize the effectiveness of using certified filters for reducing lead in drinking water, introduce minimum corrective actions when lead is found in a sample and provide better direction on flushing of plumbing.

Lead levels above Ontario's standard of 10 micrograms per litre often originate from lead service lines and lead-containing components in plumbing such as pipes, solder, and fixtures — especially in buildings built prior to 1990. In buildings where the plumbing contains lead components and the pH of the water is low, the longer water stands in the plumbing, the more lead will leach into it. When the tap is turned on, the water that has been standing in the pipes may have accumulated lead levels higher than Ontario's standard.

Under Ontario's strong framework to address and follow up on lead exceedances, facility owners must take immediate corrective action if there is a lead exceedance to protect users and take steps as directed by the local Medical Officer of Health.

Key findings from the Chief Drinking Water Inspector's Annual Report 2016-2017

Each year, Ontario's Chief Drinking Water Inspector reports on the performance of Ontario's regulated drinking water systems.

This year, detailed information supporting the [2016-2017 Chief Drinking Water Inspector's report](#), including test results associated with individual drinking water systems and facilities, is available on Ontario's [Open Data Catalogue](#). This expanded drinking water data is expected to be updated throughout each year, with summary results released annually.

Municipal and laboratory results

More than 80% of Ontario residents get their drinking water from a municipal residential drinking water system. Ministry inspectors are responsible for inspecting all of these drinking water systems each year to help ensure they meet the province's legislative and regulatory requirements. Ministry inspectors also inspect all laboratories licensed by the province to conduct drinking water testing.

In 2016-17, results showed Ontario municipal residential drinking water systems continue to have excellent results and meet Ontario's comprehensive and stringent regulatory requirements:

- 99.8% of more than 517,000 test results met Ontario's drinking water quality standards.
- 70% of systems received a 100% inspection rating and 99.4% of systems received an inspection rating of greater than 80%.
- All municipal residential drinking water systems were inspected.

- All 52 laboratories were inspected at least twice in 2016-17, with an overall inspection rating for all laboratory inspections of greater than 90%.

Compliance and enforcement activities

Ministry inspectors have the authority to enforce Ontario's drinking water protection laws. When requirements are not met, inspectors may issue contravention and/or preventative measures orders to improve compliance with the law.

In 2016-17:

- Nine contravention and 2 preventative measures orders were issued to 11 non-municipal year-round residential drinking water systems.
- Eight systems serving designated facilities received 7 contravention orders and 1 preventative measures order.
- Three contravention orders were issued to 3 licensed laboratories.

There were 6 cases with convictions involving 5 regulated systems and 1 non-licensed well contractor which, taken together, resulted in fines of \$50,500.

Operator certification and training

An operator of a drinking water system must be trained and certified according to the type and class of system that they operate. Depending on the classification level of the system that they operate, they must complete between 60 and 150 combined hours of continuing education and on-the-job training every 3 years to renew their certificates. An operator can hold multiple certificates allowing them to work in more than 1 type of drinking water system.

As of March 31, 2017, Ontario had 6,835 certified drinking water operators, holding 9,308 certificates. Of these, 168 were employed as system operators in First Nations across the province, holding 248 drinking water operator certificates.

The [Walkerton Clean Water Centre](#) provides provincewide training for operators and owners of drinking water systems, with a focus on small and remote drinking water systems, including those serving First Nation communities. In 2016-17, more than 6,500 new and existing professionals were provided with high quality operator training programs on water treatment equipment, technology and operating requirements, as well as environmental issues, including water conservation.

The centre has initiated work to incorporate energy efficiency into its curriculum with the aim of increasing sustainability of drinking water operations.

Updating Ontario's drinking water standards

An important part of Ontario's eight-part drinking water safety net is the reliance on strict health-based drinking water quality standards. With the science of drinking water evolving all the time, it is important that Ontario's drinking water quality standards reflect the best scientific findings and advice available.

In December 2016, Ontario acted on internationally recognized scientific research and expert advice to introduce three new standards (for toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene), make changes to 2 others (for selenium and tetrachloroethylene) and remove 1 redundant standard (for nitrate and nitrite). These changes came into effect July 1, 2017.

The ministry also updated 2 aesthetic objectives for ethylbenzene and xylene and adopted a new aesthetic objective for methyl-t-butyl ether. An aesthetic objective establishes desirable properties for such water characteristics as colour, odour, taste and turbidity.

These amendments allow Ontario to align with national Health Canada guidelines and with recommendations provided by Ontario's Drinking Water Advisory Council.

More information about these amendments is available on the Environmental Registry.

Updated: November 21, 2017

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Footnotes

- [1] [^] On August 28, 2017, the federal government announced that it will be replacing Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada with 2 new departments: a Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and a Department of Indigenous Services.