

April 8, 2024

The Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
5th Floor, 777 bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Jones,

The 2023 Auditor General's Value-for-Money audit of Public Health Ontario (PHO) recommended that PHO, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, update and implement a plan to streamline public health laboratory operations. That plan included gradually discontinuing free private drinking water testing. The proposed phase out of free water testing for private drinking water is of significant concern to our local Source Protection Committee.

Private systems are not protected through legislated requirement under the *Safe Drinking Water Act*, 2002, and *Clean Water Act*, 2006, but are more likely to contribute to cases of gastrointestinal illness than municipal systems. In the Saugeen, Grey Sauble, Northern Bruce Peninsula Source Protection Region, about 60,000 residents do not receive water from municipal systems, with many relying on a private drinking water system, including wells. This accounts for approximately 35% of the population in our Region.

Our Source Protection Committee has begun to implement new Best Practices initiatives for private well owners under the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks' Source Protection Program. These initiatives are aimed at targeting higher risk private water users where municipal and/or public health measures can be implemented to address threats to these systems. In support of these efforts, staff are planning to deliver education and outreach materials to private well owners in higher risk areas. In support of these efforts, it is imperative that residents continue to have access to free well water testing to reduce any barriers to monitoring the safety of these private wells.

You will recall that in the Walkerton Inquiry Report Part 2, Justice Dennis O'Connor concluded the privatization of laboratory testing of drinking water samples contributed directly to the E. coli O157:H7 outbreak in Walkerton, Ontario in May 2000. It is imperative that the privatization of private drinking water testing, for a fee, not be considered as part of the proposed streamlining efforts of public health laboratory operations in the province.

All Ontarians deserve safe, clean water and free well water testing is a way to help ensure that is possible for everyone. Any devolution to a fee-based private service will be a significant disincentive for rural dwellers to test their wells.

Two Source Protection Committee representatives, also elected Municipal Council members (Jim Hanna, Deputy Mayor of Huron-Kinloss and the undersigned, Councillor for Brockton-Walkerton) would like to request delegations with yourself and Minister Thompson at the upcoming Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) conference August 18-21, 2024 in Ottawa, regarding this topic, and will do so through the normal process.

Sincerely,



B Carl Kuhnke

Chair, Saugeen, Grey Sauble, Northern Bruce Peninsula
Source Protection Committee

Cc via email:

Hon. Lisa Thompson, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Hon. Andrea Khanjin, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Kirsten Service, Director, Conservation and Source Protection Branch, MoECP
Grey Bruce Public Health
Municipal CAOs and Clerks
Grey and Bruce Federations of Agriculture
Source Protection Committee
Source Protection Management Committee