

## RDN WATER PURVEYOR WORKING GROUP

### Discussion Notes from October 7, 2013 Workshop

A workshop of the Regional District of Nanaimo's Water Purveyor Working Group (WPWG) was held on October 7, 2013 at the Parksville Community and Conference Centre.

The WPWG events are an opportunity for small water system operators and managers to network and learn from each other, and to hear from expert speakers on topics relevant to small water systems.

The October 7<sup>th</sup> workshop included a series of roundtable discussions on the "top challenges" of being a water purveyor, as identified by participants. There were also two short presentations on tools that are or will soon be available for small water system operators and managers:

1. Guide to Financial Best Management Practices for Community Water Systems in BC – Presented by Vernon Rogers, Sustainable Infrastructure Society
  - <http://bmp.waterbc.ca>
2. Water Use Reporting Centre – Presented by Michelle Cook, Urban Systems
  - [www.obwb.ca/tools/bc-water-use-reporting-centre](http://www.obwb.ca/tools/bc-water-use-reporting-centre)

Notes taken during the roundtable discussions during the October 7<sup>th</sup> workshop are presented here.

### Top Challenges for Water Purveyors

#### 5 Top Challenges of being a water purveyor were selected for discussion:

1. Funding for system upgrades
2. Education and training
3. Rainwater as a water source
4. Cross-connection control
5. Source water protection

#### 1. Funding for system upgrades

##### The Challenge

- Anticipated changes to VIHA requirements may mean that systems have to upgrade their equipment
- Finding enough money to upgrade systems to ensure they meet the VIHA requirements is a challenge
- Difficult to decide whether or not to upgrade a system – financial risk to make the investment, and regulatory risk if you don't upgrade



## Responses to the Challenge

- Van City Credit Union works with the Sustainable Infrastructure Society (SIS) to provide loans to small water systems – see WaterBC.ca

## 2. Education and training

### The Challenge

- The requirements for water system operators to be certified and keep up their training is not clear, as VIHA often makes exceptions
- How the EOCP fits in to VIHA requirements for training is not clear
- It takes a significant amount of time and money to get certified and do the training to maintain certification within EOCP
- Not sure which courses to take - no specified courses are prescribed for on-going training
- The BCWWA Small Water Systems Course was not helpful for a small system as it was not specific enough
- No one wants to be liable for a small water system without insurance

### Responses to the Challenge

- Seeking out free training and on-line training where possible
- Municipalities sometimes bring trainers to Vancouver Island to reduce travel costs
- The RDN Drinking Water and Watershed Protection program has invited small water purveyors to events such as these workshops
- The RDN could put a list of training companies and training opportunities on their website
- The RDN could host courses for really small water systems
- WaterBC.ca provides assistance with insurance for small system operators

## 3. Rainwater as a water source

### The Challenge

- VIHA does not accept rainwater as a source for potable water for multiple connections/ water systems; it therefore isn't currently a feasible alternative source.
- Note: Rainwater is acceptable as a potable water source for individual residential property use, as the individual residence does not fall under VIHA requirements.

## 4. Cross connection control

### The Challenge

- Cross-connection is critical to keep potentially contaminated water from entering a potable water supply system
- It's impossible to know the status of every cross-connection device in a system

### Responses to the Challenge

- Assess the risk, and assess the status of cross-connection when possible

## 5. Source water protection



## **The Challenge**

- Many activities can impact our water supply, such as local water bottling plants using lots of water from our aquifer, many wells in the same aquifer, and new developments
- A local coal mine proposed would have a catastrophic impact on the aquifer
- Overuse of aquifer due to many wells on same aquifer
- Possible failure of system – not enough water

## **Responses to the Challenge**

- Early, and informed civil action
- Civil protests, letter-writing campaigns, political pressure, baseline sampling, joint studies

## **Presentation – Guide to Financial Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Community Water Supply Systems**

Vernon Rogers, Sustainable Infrastructure Society

- Guide to Financial BMPs available at: <http://bmp.waterbc.ca>

### **How could the tool be useful to you?**

- It would help us bring out records together to help with budgeting
- It could support a loan application
- The budget planning would help us justify rate increases
- It would help us convince residents to save for problems with infrastructure
- Informing stakeholders about long-term operating, maintenance and emergency response costs
- To keep track of when equipment was purchased and estimate when it will have to be replaced

### **What hurdles are there to using the tool?**

- Knowing specifics about the system (e.g. location of different elements)
- It is time consuming to do an inventory
- I am not very computer savvy
- It takes time to learn to use the tool

### **How likely are you to use the tool?**

- Likely to use one or more sections relevant to short-term needs

## **Presentation - Water Use Reporting Centre**

Michelle Cook, Urban Systems

### **How could the tool be useful to you?**

- Could be useful for surface water reporting for irrigation
- Help us keep a check on local water usage
- Tracking our water levels and usage
- Informing water users of water issues



### **What hurdles are there to using the tool?**

- Staff time it takes to input the information
- It would be more useful if it were accessible to all water users (not designed for individual homes on Gabriola Island, where water use is critical)
- If water users could select to allow their information to be viewed publicly this would provide useful information for the local area

### **How likely are you to use the tool?**

- Likely to use it
- Will only use it if the government requires reporting
- It must be user friendly
- A contractor to others is not likely to use the reporting tool

## **Water Purveyor Working Group Feedback**

### **What has been useful?**

- The events have been valuable for providing resources, connections to other purveyors, and education
- The WPWG website with information has been valuable
- Chance to network with other operators and meet in person
- Chance to share ideas and solutions with other small water purveyors
- Hearing others' challenges and solutions

### **What could be better?**

- Facebook group or other electronic networking site would be helpful when issues or questions arise that purveyors would like to discuss with each other
  - (Note: a public Facebook Group has been started by the Sustainable Infrastructure Society – Water BC Community Water Suppliers)
- Presentation on technical / practical running of system
- Profession speakers ie well driller, treatment
- Examples of solved water system problems
- Hard to stay on topic at round tables
- A bigger room - it was very noisy for cross table discussions

### **What topics would you find useful?**

- We would benefit from specific training (e.g. water chemistry)
- Visits to other small systems
- Bring in specialists for small water purveyors:
  - Water quality issues + treatment solutions available locally
  - Causes of water quality issues – water chemistry
  - Grey water re-use
  - Well drilling – legalities, common well problems
  - Legal advisors, liability insurance
  - Setting water rates



- Civil engineer + asset inventory and replacement