



FAX COVER

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Message :

How can First Nations better influence Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Health Canada's (HC) processes? How do First Nations communities make sure that the plants and services they receive are the best ones? What kinds of issues should First Nations be looking at to ensure INAC and HC are doing their job for the communities they serve? This week, the Safe Drinking Water Foundation looks at the questions that First Nations should be asking of their possible leaders about their drinking water.

With the election in October, this is a perfect time for all First Nations communities and individuals to make their local and national leaders show them what they will do to make the lives of all First Nations better and brighter than before.

In 2007, INAC and HC changed the First Nations contribution agreements and gave all responsibility for drinking water quality to Chief and Council. Unfortunately, INAC and HC failed to transfer any decision making power to Chief and Council. So even though INAC and HC control how water is treated, what plants to build, and how water is tested, Chief and Council take the blame for any poor quality water. **The SDWF is urging First Nations communities to become informed and aware for the upcoming elections across Canada. This opportunity can be a forum with which First Nations can voice their concerns with the way First Nations drinking water is managed. First Nations must demand answers to their questions before they vote, they must be convinced that their candidate will do everything he or she can possibly do to make clean drinking water a right for ALL First Nations communities.**

Please visit www.safewater.org and go to "Policy" to learn more about the politics surrounding this issue. The SDWF has prepared a set of articles to provide you with accurate information which you can use to make informed decisions which will benefit your people. For further information please refer to our Policy contact Morgan Murray at communications@safewater.org or (306)934-0389.

Please print and circulate this information to Chief and Council, Water Keepers and post at the Band office for all concerned individuals to become informed. SDWF would like to help you ensure that your water is indeed safe. We have volunteer scientists and engineers with water treatment experience both from Canada and internationally and they all share SDWF's goal of safe drinking water for all Canadians.

What to ask candidates before you vote?

The abysmal standards of First Nation drinking water is going to be high on the agenda no matter which party rules Canada following the federal election. First Nations communities must have the opportunity to outline what YOU see as the future of drinking water regulations and treatment. **It is important that First Nations have a clear vision in order to hold the government accountable for the best interests of your communities.**

SDWF has examined the present state of First Nations water management to discover the weaknesses in the system and has made strong recommendations to significantly increase First Nations' access to truly safe drinking water. SDWF has found that a new system for First Nations drinking water needs to include three key factors. **Any new government's effective solution must include these THREE BASIC ELEMENTS:**

◆ ***AN INDEPENDENT NATIONAL REGULATOR:***

A regulatory body that sets national standards, which are monitored and upheld by First Nations, and is independent of the government agencies it evaluates.

Why?

1. In the current system, government agencies set the standards and evaluate their own performance
2. This creates a conflict of interest where the government has an interest in not reporting unsafe water as often or as aggressively as they should.
3. It is crucial that any regulator be financially independent from the government agencies in regulates.

◆ ***ENFORCEABLE NATIONAL REGULATIONS:***

A set of national water quality and operational standards that are both adapted to and apply to all First Nations

Why?

1. Current practices leave little to no recourse for communities which have received substandard services.
2. The introduction of licensing systems for construction and functioning of facilities could ensure that engineers and other professionals are accountable for the successful functioning of their product.
3. Enforceable standards of inspection and testing could ensure the timely monitoring of all First Nations drinking water.
4. Strict and enforceable regulations for government agencies could also provide reasons for these agencies to increase the quality and quantity of their services.

◆ **INCREASED COMMITMENT:**

A commitment to properly estimate the cost of upgrading present systems to the regulated national standards and a further commitment to follow through on the upgrades with associated resources, such as training.

Why?

1. We need a commitment to properly estimate and provide the real cost of bringing systems up to standards and to decide how to provide those resources.
2. First Nations currently lack the funding to provide safe drinking water.
3. First Nations also lack the decision making power to ensure that funds are well spent and to oversee developments.

In the upcoming election it is the responsibility of each community, household, and individual to demand that their political leaders outline how they will fix the injustice of First Nations drinking water. SDWF believes that First Nations communities need a new regulatory system for drinking water management in order to ensure that they receive safe drinking water which, at minimum, meets or exceeds all parameters of the present drinking water quality guidelines for all First Nations everywhere. SDWF is working hard to make this a reality, but individuals and communities can make huge impacts as well.

In the upcoming election ask your candidates these three questions and make them explain their solutions to your satisfaction, before casting your vote,

- *Will you implement national regulations for drinking water quality?*
- *How will you address INAC's and HC's self-monitoring?*
- *What is your strategy for creating an independent national regulator for First Nations drinking water?*

We encourage you to exercise your vote, select a candidate who will make safe drinking water a reality for ALL First Nations, choose your Member of Parliament carefully.

We would like to hear your concerns and suggestions, you are welcome to send information to us anonymously and we guarantee we will respect your privacy. If you are interested, please return the attached survey and a member of SDWF's Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team will be happy to call you.

If you are interested in the subject matter of this article, you can find it and our other background articles as well as other reports and more information on our website www.safewater.org under "Policy".

CALL TO ACTION FOR First Nations Drinking Water

Name of community: _____

I wish to remain anonymous Yes **or**

Contact person: _____

Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____

Position: _____ Email: _____ Date: _____

1) Do you treat ground or surface water? _____

2) What treatment process do you use, can you describe it?

3) How much water do you treat per day? _____

4) Do you have support when problems arise? Yes or No please explain

5) Who do you answer to when there are problems? eg. a committee or Chief & Council

6) How many people do you service with water? _____

7) Do you have an adequate supply amount of water for your community? Yes or No

8) What are the total and free chlorine levels in your distributed water?

a) Does it vary within the same close range? _____

b) Free chlorine: _____

c) Total chlorine: _____

9) What are the chlorine residuals in the distribution system?

10) Have you had any boil water advisories? Yes or No

a) If yes why was it called? _____

b) How was it resolved? _____

c) How long did it last? _____

11) Do you measure turbidity? Yes or No

a) What are the average levels? _____

12) Do you drink your water? Yes or No
a) If so how does it taste? _____
b) Does it carry an odor? Explain if it does. _____

13) Does the raw water have any smell? _____

14) Do you have raw water data?

15) Do you have treated water data?

16) Are you willing to share some of the data with SDWF's Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team (AAWTT)? _____

17) Do you want a scientist to have a look at the data and get back to you with his/her interpretation? Circle Yes or No

18) Do you have any health concerns for your community when it comes to the water?

19) Is there anyone from outside the community that tests your water? Circle Yes or No
If so who? For example EHO, or water quality monitor.

Do you test your water on all the water quality parameters yearly? ie: iron, arsenic, etc. Circle Yes or No

If so are you willing to share your results with SDWF's AAWTT? Circle Yes or No

20) Do you know what your annual bill is for chemicals for your water treatment process
\$ _____

21) How long has it been since INAC allocated any funding to improve or replace your water treatment plant? Please Circle

Less than 5 years 5 – 10 years over 10 years

22) How much did INAC spend on your community water treatment? \$ _____

Any comments:

I have forwarded the information you have sent regarding First Nations Call to Action for Safe Drinking Water to our Chief and Council Yes or No