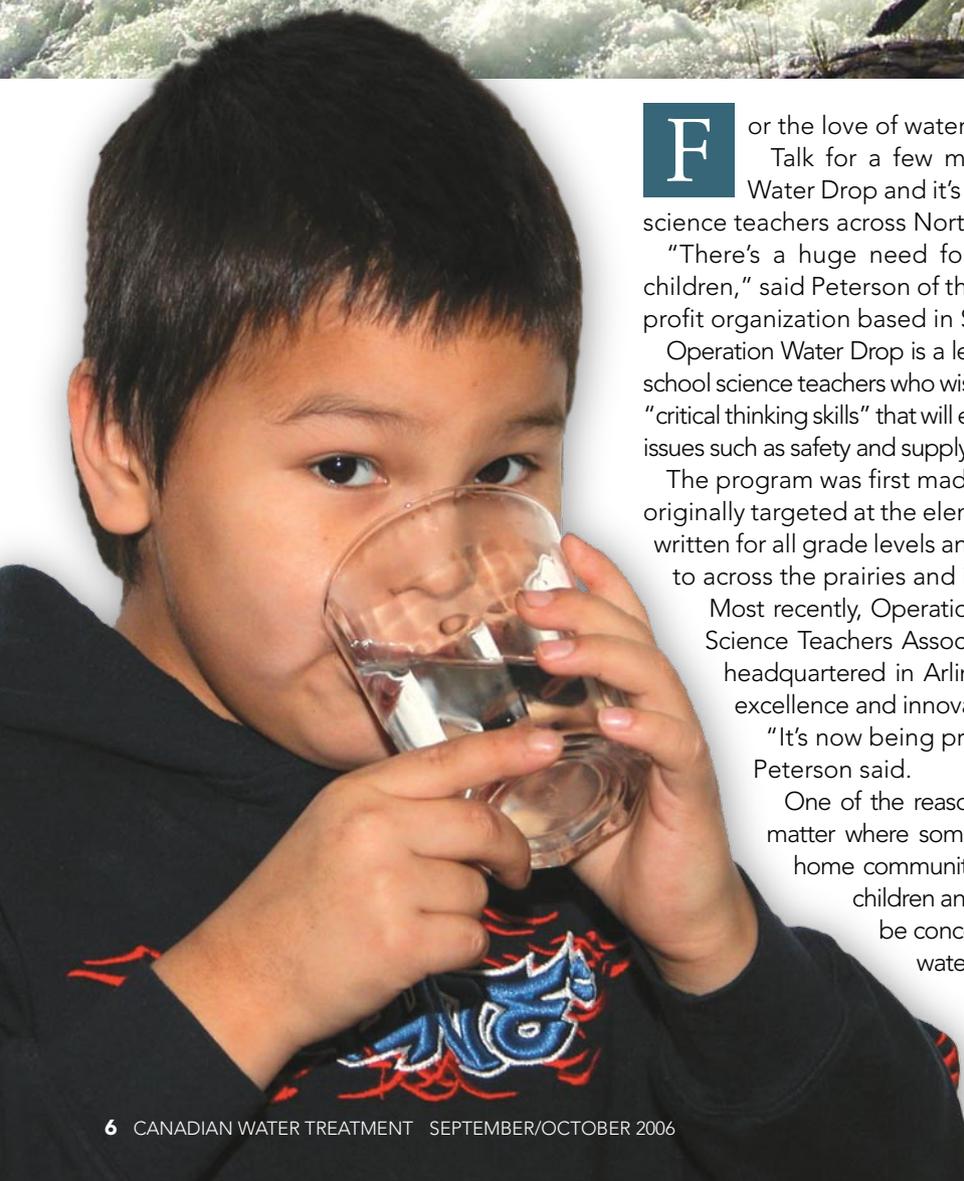
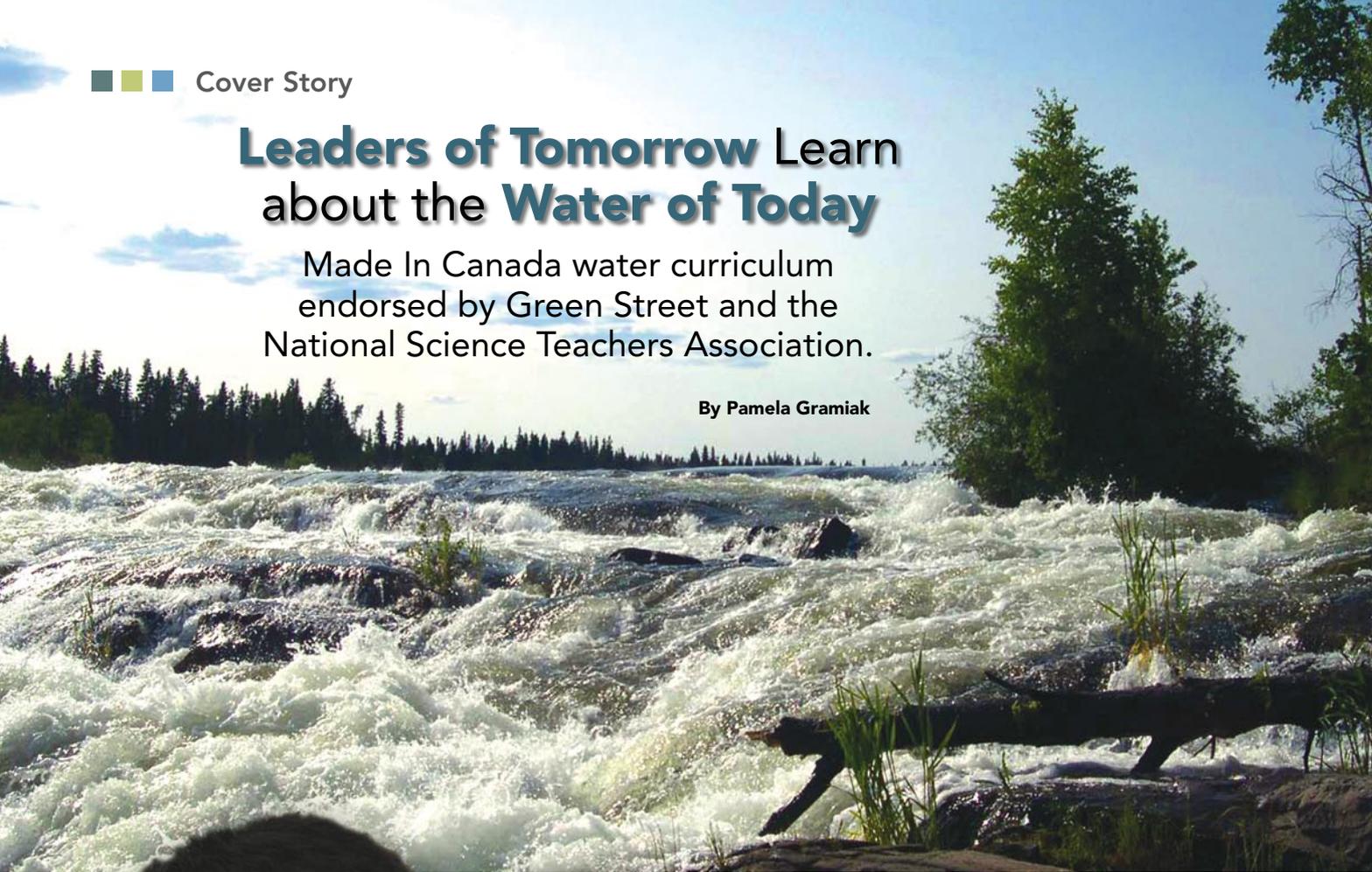


# Leaders of Tomorrow Learn about the Water of Today

Made In Canada water curriculum endorsed by Green Street and the National Science Teachers Association.

By Pamela Gramiak



**F**or the love of water. Talk for a few minutes with Sue Peterson about Operation Water Drop and it's easy to understand why so many of Canada's science teachers across North America are signing up for the program.

"There's a huge need for education about water issues for school children," said Peterson of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation, a not-for-profit organization based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Operation Water Drop is a lesson program available to elementary and high school science teachers who wish to provide an opportunity for students to learn "critical thinking skills" that will enable them to become actively involved in water issues such as safety and supply both in their community and around the world.

The program was first made available in 2001 in Saskatchewan and was originally targeted at the elementary level. Since then, curricula have been written for all grade levels and the program has grown from Saskatchewan to across the prairies and is now offered nationally.

Most recently, Operation Water Drop was endorsed by the National Science Teachers Association, an American professional organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia whose mission is "to promote excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all."

"It's now being promoted to all U.S. schools in all U.S. states," Peterson said.

One of the reasons the education programs are so relevant no matter where someone lives is that people aren't always in their home community. One of the goals of the program is to make children and youth aware of the fact that while they may not be concerned about water quality in other communities, water quality can, and often does, affect them.

"The fact is, people travel," Peterson said. "They buy coffee and they buy Coke with ice in it. What if it's (poor water quality) happening in that community?"

Another reason awareness is so important, Peterson emphasized, is just because a local water source doesn't exhibit any symptoms of poor quality doesn't mean it can't or won't.

"Water-borne diseases often take five years to present themselves."

Operation Water Drop is available to all science teachers interested in incorporating the curriculum into his or her lesson plans. Peterson said she and her summer staff are busily trying to get kits packaged together in time for the current school year.

The kits, which include the lesson plan and all the equipment required for water testing, are available on a cost-recovery fee structure of \$50 for elementary schools and \$100 for high schools. The cost recovery is necessary, Peterson said, because the Safe Drinking Water Foundation, whose mission is, in part, to "promote safe drinking water through supporting innovative research and development and increase awareness of health concerns from



**"We're trying to develop the leaders of tomorrow, to tell them it's one thing to think, it's another to act."**

These two bottles of water show a comparison of urban versus rural water supplies. The sample on the left was taken from Yellowquill First Nation, Sask., the one on the right from Saskatoon, Sask.

consumption of poor quality water," is funded and staffed solely on public and private grants and public and corporate donations.

"We operate on an annual budget of less than \$100,000," Peterson said. "We get lots done in the summer months (through hire-a-student programs)."

In addition to Operation Water Drop, SDWF also offers lesson plans and classroom activities free of charge. Operation Water Flow can be incorporated into classes other than science including health, social studies, language arts and math. Operation Water Spirit, written by Michelle McKay-Poorman, a Cree woman with a master's degree in aboriginal curriculum development, promotes the values of water and the need and respect for water.

"There's a real need to develop aboriginal awareness (about water)," said Peterson.

Operation Water Flow and Operation Water Spirit are both available for free downloads at the SDWF website ([safewater.org](http://safewater.org)) and all three programs have recently been endorsed by the Green Street program, a Canadian-based, not-for-profit organization that furthers environmental and sustainability education. Green Street, which is sponsoring the purchase of 100 Operation Water Drop kits for high schools and 50 kits for elementary schools, aims to get students and their teachers excited about learning about the environment and sustainability issues and promotes Operation Water Flow on its website ([green-street.ca](http://green-street.ca)).

To support the Safe Drinking Water Foundation's efforts to promote water quality and equality, visit the website to make a donation or provide gifts in kind.

"Take out a membership," Peterson said. "You can even link to Pay Pal." ■

Details at [www.safewater.org](http://www.safewater.org).

# Template for Change

Template for Change is a program that resulted from the Action Plans in the final lesson plan of Operation Water Drop. As students made their community Action Plan a part of the closing to the school program, parents and community members became aware of the student perspectives on drinking water and requested that the action plan become a blueprint for implementation and not end in the classroom. With this goal in mind Template for Change was developed, with financial support from Alberta Eco trust.

In the fall of 2004, the Safe Drinking Water Foundation developed Template for Change, a blueprint to guide and lead communities through the challenges and obstacles that restrict the quality of water for their citizens. Dr. Hans Peterson, executive director at SDWF, is available for a one-hour phone conference, with any communities participating in Template for Change, to respond to questions and provide advice.

As part of the Template for Change, students are encouraged to organize local Water Awareness workshops and information sessions for their own or neighbouring communities. The Water Awareness Community Presentations include an introductory presentation from Dr. Hans and recorded presentations on DVD from residents of Yellow Quill First Nation, Saddle Lake First Nation and Six Nations, all located in Saskatchewan, and a special message from Canada's environmental champion, David Suzuki. In total, Template for Change contains 12 DVDs with more than 16 hours of recorded presentations that include all speaker presentations from the recent SDWF international conference *The Future of Water Treatment*. ■

**To order Template for Change or a Water Awareness Community Presentation for a community or school, visit [www.safewater.org](http://www.safewater.org).**