



The toxic taxi



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A toxic taxi? That's one of the more unusual ideas contained in the outreach work plan prepared by South Nation Conservation following provincial government approval of the regional approach developed to protect source-to-tap clean water supplies.

Increased emphasis on protecting drinking water is a concept introduced more than five years ago right across the province by the Liberal government. It was in response to the Walkerton tragedy of 2000 when seven people died and hundreds became ill from contaminated municipal drinking water.

E-coli bacteria entered a poorly monitored municipal well on local farmland. It was eventually determined that the farmer had been adhering to best practices in his operation. The same couldn't be said for the Walkerton waterworks staff. The drive towards source protection has been controversial, particularly among some farmers who felt it would ultimately restrict use of their land and take money out of their pockets in meeting strict new guidelines.

After years of work by regional Source Protection Committees, the project might have evaporated had the government been replaced.

But that wasn't the case and, following an interruption in activity during the election campaign and subsequent breaking in of new ministers, approval of regional plans resumed.

One of the latest plans to get the go-ahead is one developed by the Raisin-South Nation Source Protection Committee covering a large area in the extreme east-end of Ontario. The approval announcement came Oct. 31, with the plan to become effective next April 1.

Like other regional plans approved or nearing completion, the Raisin-South Nation version sets out actions to eliminate, manage or reduce risks to drinking water sources.

Protecting sources that supply drinking water is the first step in ensuring there's never another Walkerton incident, said Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray

In the name of full disclosure, I must point out that I've been a member of the Raisin-South Nation committee from the outset, representing the general public. Several other members

have represented the farming community, municipalities, industries, and agencies.

During the course of deliberations, the committee and its personnel went out of their way to reassure farmers they wouldn't be disadvantaged by final provisions in the regional protection plan. While many have adopted a wait-and-see attitude, I feel from close observation that most have been appeased.

When it comes to implementation, while not all regions are taking the same approach, 18 municipalities within the Raisin-South Nation catchment area have signed over responsibility to the two conservation authorities in place.

The province is providing 100 per cent funding, with education and outreach provisions to be implemented over two years by staff of the Raisin and South Nation conservation authorities. Funding to continue with measures after the two years is up hasn't yet been determined.

The toxic taxi was tossed into the mix of possible ways of dealing with hazardous waste material in the South Nation zone. At the moment, most municipalities remove household hazardous goods by organizing drop-offs on a yearly basis.

But as member Cindy Saucier noted at a recent South Nation Communications Committee meeting, that isn't often enough.

"People don't hold on to their hazardous materials for a year," Saucier said. "They find a way to get rid of them."

Why not go door-to-door and pick up the unwanted products in a marked vehicle specifically for that purpose? The toxic taxi!

The taxi is just one cog in an extensive communications and outreach program being prepared by South Nation staff to promote source protection.

That's what's happening in just one of 19 regional source protection areas. In the weeks and months to come, rural Ontario residents should brace themselves for a clean water information onslaught.