

530 communities in BC told to boil water; 13 in Alberta

Hundreds of communities told to boil water
B.C. second in boil-water advisories

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OTTAWA -- More than 1,760 neighbourhoods and communities across Canada are being told to boil their drinking water, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reported Monday.

"That's the minimum. There's probably more than that," said Steve Hrudehy, a public health engineer who also served on the research advisory panel into contaminated water crisis in Walkerton, Ont. Seven people died and at least 2,300 people became ill due to an outbreak of *E. coli* in the Walkerton water supply in May, 2000.

While boil-water advisories are supposed to be used as a "precautionary measure," Hrudehy said it is obvious the advisories are being used in place of treatment.

"A lot of those advisories have been in place for months and in some cases years. So clearly in those kinds of situations, the boil-water advisory is being used as an alternative to treatment, which is just not acceptable," he said.

A spokesman for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care also told the *CMAJ* that public health units in Ontario, for example, do not always report all their advisories to the ministry, nor do they always report when an advisory has been lifted.

"We've got a situation in Canada ... where we've downloaded responsibility for providing drinking water to municipalities and small regional districts and they're the least well-equipped financially and otherwise resourced to do the job," Hrudehy said.

He said other countries, such as Australia, have state-wide corporations that are responsible for providing safe drinking water "to get around this problem where you have all these really small entities responsible who really can't handle the job."

The *CMAJ* said Ontario, at 679, and B.C., at 530, have the most boil-water advisories in effect.

While poor water quality in Canada is often seen as an issue primarily on first nations reserves, the *CMAJ* said none of the 93 boil-water advisories currently in place in those communities are included in the 1,760 advisories elsewhere in Canada.

The advisories are issued for various reasons, including adverse taste, total coliform count or a breakdown in chlorination equipment.

UNSAFE TO DRINK

Provinces, territories with boil-water orders in effect:

British Columbia -- 530

Alberta -- 13

Saskatchewan -- 126

Manitoba -- 59

Ontario -- 679

Quebec -- 61

New Brunswick -- 2

Nova Scotia -- 67

Prince Edward Island -- 0

Newfoundland -- 228

Yukon -- 0

Northwest Territories -- 1

Nunavut -- 0

Source: Canadian Medical Association Journal survey

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