

# DRINKING WATER MYTHS

IT IS EASY TO BE MISLED BY WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT MUNICIPAL DRINKING WATER. HERE ARE 6 FACTS BEHIND THE MYTHS SURROUNDING MUNICIPAL DRINKING WATER.

## **WATER IS A NATURAL RESOURCE SO IT SHOULD BE FREE.**

**FACT:** Water is free. **But it costs a lot to pump, deliver, store, treat, and remove drinking and wastewater for more than 80-percent of Ontario's residents, whom rely on municipal water systems.** Ontarians who use municipal water pay monthly fees for this service, but studies have shown that this is not enough to cover the cost of operating, repairing, and upgrading/expanding drinking or wastewater treatment systems for growing populations.



## **PROTECTING SOURCES OF DRINKING WATER IS TOO EXPENSIVE**

**FACT:** Remediating contaminated ground or surface water can be **40 times more expensive than taking steps to protect the water at the source.** The Walkerton tragedy is estimated to have cost approximately \$200 million for the healthcare, remediation, compensation, and public inquiry. Preventing contamination at the source also reduces the costs of treating water later in the drinking water treatment process.



## **OUR WATER IS TREATED, SO WE DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THE HEALTH OF DRINKING WATER SOURCES**

**FACT:** Water treatment systems don't remove all contaminants from water, especially chemicals, which is why it's important to protect the source. Sometimes contamination problems develop that are impossible to correct, causing water supply sources to be shut down. **Water treatment is only one method of protecting drinking water**- other methods include preventing contamination of source water, using adequate distribution systems, testing water, and properly training water managers.



## **THE CONTAMINATION OF WALKERTON'S DRINKING WATER COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED WITH PROPER CHLORINATION**

**FACT:** In the Walkerton Inquiry Report, Justice O'Connor described a system-wide collapse which began with the brothers responsible for the town's water. O'Connor found that they lacked the skills to do their jobs properly, lied to protect their jobs, and that there were too few checks and balances in place within Ontario's Environment Ministry to catch the problems.

**"It is simply wrong to say ...that Stan Koebel, or the Walkerton PUC, were solely responsible for the outbreak, or that they were the only ones who could have prevented it,"** O'Connor wrote.

At the time, the government was implementing a widespread cost cutting plan, ignored several warnings about the potential impact of cost reductions, and cut red tape. In addition, it was also determined the municipal well was improperly constructed, allowing surface water runoff to drain directly into the well. Further, the well was at the edge of municipal boundaries and the location of the well was unknown to the adjacent farm, which was spreading manure for the upcoming agricultural season. Finally, a large, lengthy rainfall occurred, increasing the amount of runoff from the agricultural field.



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## WE HAVE LOTS OF WATER IN ONTARIO, SO THERE IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

**FACT:** Because we are surrounded by water we tend to think there is an unlimited supply. In reality, there isn't. **All of the water we have, and will ever have, is in constant motion, moving around the planet as it changes from solid to liquid to vapour.** When we take water faster than it can be replenished, we face shortages and sometimes even water-use bans. Pressures on our water supplies include drought, contamination, and the demands of a growing population.



## BOTTLED WATER IS SAFER THAN TAP WATER

**FACT:** Tap water is regulated by Health Canada and the Canadian Government. Guidelines are set to control the levels of potentially harmful substances that are allowed in drinking water. **Tap water in Ontario goes through a very thorough treatment and quality control process, and is subject to a large number of standards in order to meet federal guidelines.** Municipalities test their water sources constantly to ensure it is safe for their residents.

Bottled water has a negative impact on the environment, with only a small percentage of bottles being recycled - most end up in landfill sites or the natural environment, like our rivers and lakes. In addition, bottle water companies are not subject to the same standards of quality control because they are classified as a *food* and fall under the Food and Drug Act. Companies perform testing on their water, but the results do not have to be made public. Aside from arsenic, lead and coliform bacteria, the act does not set limits on specific contaminants, rather states that food products cannot contain "poisonous or harmful substances" and must be prepared in sanitary conditions.

Spring and mineral water are the most common kinds of bottled water and are subject to a few more rules: the product must be fit for human consumption at the source and can't be treated in any way that would modify its composition. Other kinds of bottled water comes from sources like rivers, lakes, and even taps.



DRINKING WATER  
**SOURCE PROTECTION**  
Remembering Walkerton

