



# News Release

For Immediate Release

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## Key Recommendation Still Not Implemented 14 Years After Walkerton, Auditor General Says

(TORONTO) Since 2000, when seven people died and more than 2,300 became ill when the drinking water in Walkerton became contaminated, Ontario has still not implemented a key recommendation of the Walkerton Commission of Inquiry into the tragedy, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2014 Annual Report*.

“Fourteen years after the Walkerton crisis, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is still in the process of reviewing and approving locally developed source water protection plans. Development of these plans, the first defence against contamination of drinking water, was recommended by the Walkerton inquiry and are required by the *Clean Water Act* of 2006,” Lysyk said today following release of the Report. “The Ministry still has no clear time frame when all source water protection plans will be approved.”

Soon after the *Clean Water Act* was proclaimed in 2006, the Ministry established a committee in each of 19 regions of the province to develop source water protection plans to assess existing and potential threats to source water and ensure policies were in place to reduce these threats. In 2002, the government passed the Nutrient Management Act to try to prevent buildup of excess nutrients in the soil that can run off into surface waters or leach into groundwater.

Other significant findings included the following:

- Only some farms that produce and use manure fall under the requirements of the *Nutrient Management Act*. For example, the farm that was the source of contamination in Walkerton would not be captured under the Act’s regulations.
- The Ministry lacks a long-term strategy to ensure that the plans, once approved, are appropriately implemented.
- There is a high likelihood that spills from industrial and commercial facilities pose a threat to water intakes in the Great Lakes, but source water protection plans do not currently address them.
- In 2013/14, the Ministry inspected only 3% of the farms that must adhere to the Act’s regulations for proper storage and application of manure. Of those farms, about half were non-compliant, some in ways that caused a risk or threat to the environment and/or human health. The audit found that the Ministry often did not follow up on issues of non-compliance and rarely issued offence notices that could lead to fines in provincial court.
- The Ministry is recovering only about \$200,000 of the \$9.5 million in annual program costs associated with the taking of water by industrial and commercial users such as water-bottling companies.

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