

700 Lawrence Ave. W., Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

Tel: (416) 367-3313
1-800-267-6817 (Ont)
Fax: (416) 367-2844
E-mail: info@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

Honorary Patron
The Hon. David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

President
Carol Timmings
E-mail: ctimmings@opha.on.ca

Executive Director
Connie Uetrecht
E-mail: cuetrecht@opha.on.ca

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Number 11924 8771 RR0001

August 29, 2002

**To: The Honourable Ernie Eves
Premier of Ontario**

Re: Part Two Report of the Walkerton Inquiry

Honourable Premier:

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliates of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA), and the Members and Constituent Societies of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), we are writing to you in response to the second set of recommendations of the O'Connor Commission.

From our members' direct involvement in the Walkerton tragedy, through our Associations' participation in the Inquiry process, to our examination of its outcomes, we have taken a great interest in ensuring that policy makers are aware of our particular expertise in the public health aspects of drinking water. We hope that as your government fulfills its promise to implement the recommendations of the Commission, it will take advantage of that expertise.

While the goal of all of the recommendations is the protection of public health, the expertise of many disciplines beyond the public health sector must be sought out to reach that goal. The strength of a multi-barrier approach, including source protection, health hazard control, standard setting, monitoring and verification, will depend on coordinating the input of all agencies whose decisions affect each of these steps.

We also endorse, in principle, the idea of a Safe Drinking Water Act, to give legislative weight to a strong provincial source-to-tap policy of drinking water protection. This is recommended in Chapter 13 of the Report (Recommendations 65 and 66). These will be the cornerstones of the overall multi-barrier strategy, their strength again depending on conscientious planning, communication and coordination. We ask therefore that the Provincial Government first establish a process that will facilitate the co-operation of the Government and the various banks of expertise that exist within the various public health, environmental, agricultural, engineering and water agencies. The list of parties granted standing at the Inquiry identifies many of these by name, in Chapter 16 of the Report.

Indeed, many of the recommendations for the sound management of our water are predicated on the principle of coordination and consultation among the various stakeholders, with strong leadership and support from the Province. Justice O'Connor has stated that Ontario's water system is not in need of a radical overhaul, but the effective implementation of his recommendations will still require foresight, careful planning and adequate resources. Recommendation 77, which covers the establishment of local steering groups for emergency response plans, gives an idea of the type of organization that will be required to accomplish such tasks. Recommendation 78 then urges the Province to ensure that such programs are adequately funded.

We would like to commend the Government of Ontario for pledging without hesitation to act on Justice O'Connor's suggestions for a safe drinking water strategy. There is a great opportunity here for Ontario to become a model of drinking water management for the rest of the world. We have learned many lessons over the past two years, and it is important that we now apply that learning in order to foster public confidence in Ontario's drinking water system with a comprehensive strategy for its protection.

We look forward to participating in the implementation of Ontario's "Strategy for Safe Drinking Water" as the partners whose main mandate is the protection of public health for all Ontarians. We also look forward to your reply to our offer of service.

Sincerely,

Jack Lee, BA, DDS, MPH, DGrt
Acting Executive Director
Ontario Public Health Association

Andrew Papadopoulos, B.A.Sc, MBA
Executive Director
Association of Local Public Health Agencies

cc. Association of Municipalities of Ontario
All Ontario Boards of Health
Dr. Colin D'Cunha, Director, Public Health Branch and Chief Medical Officer of Health
Hon. Chris Stockwell, Minister of Environment