

SAFE DRINKING WATER

What is the Issue?

Access to safe drinking water is **crucial to health**, a basic human right and an essential component of effective policy for health protection (World Health Organization). Ottawa Public Health is provincially mandated to reduce water-borne illness in the population.

The costs of the Walkerton tragedy are estimated at \$155 million – the equivalent of 10 years of public health spending by the City of Ottawa.

What is Public Health Doing?

- **Monitoring Drinking Water and Acting Immediately:** Public Health is advised of all dangerous results from regulated water systems (such as drinking water) and ensures that immediate, corrective action is undertaken to protect the health of the public.
- **Sampling Well Water:** Public Health regularly samples water from unregulated water systems that have public access and follows up accordingly on all adverse results.
- **Investigating Complaints about Water:** Public Health investigates drinking water related complaints, provides health and technical advice to the public and agencies about drinking water, participates in public education sessions, and offers a weekly water sample collection service in the City's rural areas.

What Difference Does it Make?

Monitoring and protecting drinking water **prevents illness and death**. There is also a financial benefit in ensuring a safe drinking water supply -- the costs of the Walkerton tragedy are estimated at \$155 million.

Budget Cuts: Short-term gain, Long-term pain

Here's what happens when safe water isn't maintained:

- In 1993, **100 people died** and more than 400,000 people became ill as a result of a parasite in Milwaukee's water supply.
- In 2000, **7 people died** and more than 2,000 people became sick from bacterial contamination of Walkerton's water supply.

The economic impacts of any such catastrophe would be enormous for the City of Ottawa.