



News Release

For Immediate Release

December 1, 2021

Clean Water Agency Helps Communities Provide Safe Drinking Water: Auditor General

(Toronto) The Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) assists communities to provide safe and reliable drinking-water and reliable wastewater treatment services, says Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2021 Annual Report*. But in 2010, new legislation changed its mandate from providing drinking-water and wastewater services to communities on a break-even basis, to generating revenue and profits.

“The four and a half million Ontarians who rely on OCWA for clean water can be confident they are being well served,” said Lysyk. “But clearer direction from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is needed on whether OCWA services should be provided at a reduced price to communities in need.”

Drinking water continues to be an issue in First Nations communities, but the report states that OCWA’s support of these communities is limited. Water quality in First Nations communities is a federal responsibility. As of July 2021, there were 44 long-term boil water advisories in 26 Ontario First Nations communities. Although the Ministry has asked OCWA to support efforts to eliminate long-term drinking-water advisories in First Nations communities, the audit found that OCWA is hesitant to provide support without fully recovering its costs. OCWA is operating water treatment plants for just six of 133 First Nations in Ontario.

The report also notes that significant amounts of biosolids are still being sent to landfills from communities served by OCWA. In 2020, more than 4,000 tonnes of biosolids and more than 14,600 cubic meters of liquid biosolids were sent to landfills. Sending biosolids to landfill releases greenhouse gases into the air, which is a significant contributor to climate change.

“The Ministry should assess whether the agency’s goals should focus on the business goals of revenue and income growth, or if providing more affordable drinking-water and wastewater services to clients that need them should again be the primary goal,” said Lysyk.

The audit report contains 21 recommendations for improvement.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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