

DRINKING WATER THREATS: Commercial Fertilizer



FACT
SHEET

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Drinking Water Source Protection is a provincial program to protect our municipal drinking water sources from contamination and overuse.



Water Pollution

The Handling, Storage and Application of Commercial Fertilizer in certain specific quantities is considered a drinking water threat under Ontario's *Clean Water Act, 2006*.

Most commercial fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and may also include supplements like lime and gypsum. These nutrients could threaten the safety of drinking water sources due to runoff, leaching, leaks or spills resulting from improper handling, storage or application.

Increased nitrate concentrations in groundwater sources or runoff rich in nutrients can lead to algae blooms in surface water. Both circumstances can produce toxins that are harmful to humans and animals.



Managing the risk

When the Drinking Water Source Protection Program began, a lot of research and study went into identifying the sensitive or vulnerable areas around municipal wells and surface water intakes.

A local Source Water Protection Plan is in place in Sault Ste. Marie and most municipalities across the province. These plans contain policies to manage risks such as the threat posed by the handling, storage and application of commercial fertilizer in areas around municipal wells.

If you live in a vulnerable area, you have a special responsibility to be aware of your actions and how they can impact our drinking water supplies - a responsibility we hope you take personally. This responsibility also applies if you are leasing, renting or subletting the land. The decisions you make can affect the water coming out of the tap for you and your neighbours. Best management practices can improve water quality for future generations.



Best Management Practices

The following best management practices should be used to ensure that commercial fertilizer does not reach a municipal source of drinking water:

Make sure all containers are clearly labeled and free of holes, tears or punctures.

Do not apply fertilizer prior to forecasted heavy rainfall and avoid areas where overspray would likely runoff (paved areas).

Storage areas such as sheds and garages should be dry, well-ventilated and have a cement floor to prevent fertilizer from leaching into the soil.

If you must use commercial fertilizer limit the amount and frequency of application and always follow manufacturer instructions/guidelines.



Am I in a vulnerable area?

You can find out if you live or own property in a vulnerable area by contacting your local Risk Management Official (RMO) or Risk Management Inspector (RMI). They will help you find solutions intended to keep our municipal drinking water safe. They are available to speak to you on the phone or in person to answer any questions you might have.

If you are in a vulnerable area and you plan on making changes to your property's use, you may be required to speak with the RMO or RMI. Your local RMO will work with you to determine if your activity poses a threat to drinking water and how to manage the risk.

You'll explore options and come up with solutions that you both agree on. Certain activities may be prohibited or restricted or subject to a Risk Management Plan. The plan documents what measures are already in place and what needs to be added so that activities on the land are no longer a risk to the municipal water supply. Normal residential handling, storage and application of fertilizer is not considered a threat under the local Source Protection Plan.

WHO ARE RISK MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS (RMOs)?

Risk Management Officials, or RMOs, are specially trained and qualified to evaluate risks to municipal drinking water sources. They work with you to identify threats to vulnerable areas and to develop Risk Management Plans if you require one.

You might also meet a Risk Management Inspector, or RMI, who enforces Risk Management Plans similar to the way a building inspector enforces the Ontario Building Code. Risk Management Officials and Inspectors carry provincially issued identification that you can ask to see at any time.



Private wells are your responsibility

The measures and policies put in place to protect municipal drinking water supplies do not include private drinking water wells. If you are a private well owner, you should test your well water regularly and make sure you are maintaining it properly. If you have any health concerns about your well water, contact your local public health unit.



Prevention is key

It sounds obvious...chemicals and other toxic substances could make our water undrinkable. It's far easier to prevent contamination than it is to clean it up. In fact, for some chemicals or substances, clean-up is practically impossible. In some cases, municipalities have been forced to decommission, or plug and seal wells because of contamination.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT



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