

2007: SB22

MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary/Treasurers of School
Authorities
Director, Provincial Schools Branch
Supervisory Officer, Centre Jules-Léger

FROM: Nancy Whynot
Director, Capital Programs Branch

DATE: August 31, 2007

SUBJECT: **School water systems**

I am writing to advise you of additional requirements stemming from the provincial regulation for flushing and testing water systems in schools set out in *Ontario Regulation 243/07 – Schools, Private Schools And Day Nurseries* (see Memorandum 2007: B7 of June 7, 2007).

The goal of the new regulation is to provide increased protection for children, especially children age six and under who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of lead. It requires schools to flush water systems daily or weekly, depending on the age of the plumbing system. It also requires schools to test water annually between June 15 and August 15. I would like to thank you for having implemented this new regulation.

Based on information from the Ministry of the Environment, the vast majority – almost 97% – of Ontario schools met the provincial standard of 10 micrograms of lead per litre after flushing. This indicates that most school drinking water is meeting the new standard, partly due to the flushing procedures now in place.

The results of this water testing are reported by laboratories to the school contact. All results that exceed the provincial standard are reported to the Ministry of the Environment and the local Medical Officer of Health.

Some results that exceed the provincial standard were reported in schools built after 1990. As a result, the Chief Drinking Water Inspector is now recommending that all schools, including those built after 1990, perform daily flushing. A memorandum regarding this change from the Chief Drinking Water Inspector is attached for your review and action.

Schools with initial results that exceeded the standard of 10 micrograms of lead per litre after flushing have been working with the local Medical Officers of Health to reduce lead levels. In many cases, the re-sampling and re-testing have produced results within the provincial standard. Based on these results, the local Medical Officers of Health may indicate to boards that the school's drinking water now meets the provincial standard.

The Ministry of Education is asking boards to ensure that any school where a test result exceeds the provincial standard, or any school where a re-test result may be within the provincial standard but pending direction from the local Medical Officer of Health, to immediately

arrange for an alternative source of drinking water or filtered water for students, staff and all other users of the school and for areas of food preparation, such as cafeterias and classrooms with cooking facilities. School Principals are to inform child care operators in the school of the test results and provide them with an alternative source of drinking water or filtered water.

District school boards, school authorities and provincial schools are requested to create cost centres for any incremental expense that arises from providing alternative drinking water and/or installing water filters to reduce lead in those schools with initial results exceeding the standard of 10 micrograms of lead per litre after flushing. Please continue tracking these expenses until the alternative water source is no longer needed.

The Ministry of Education will assess incremental costs province-wide and provide appropriate compensation, including for child care centres located in schools. Further direction on the financial reporting of incremental expenditures and board-specific allocations will be provided at a later date.

Please consult the NSF website for an up-to-date list of filters that meet the NSF-53 standard for reduction of lead in drinking water. The website is at <http://www.nsf.org/certified/dwtu>. Select the "lead reduction" box under the "Reduction Claims for Drinking Water Treatment Units – Health Effects" section, then click "Search" to generate a list of specific products.

The government is taking these precautionary steps to ensure a prudent and consistent response by all schools that have an initial test result that exceeds the provincial standard. We recognize that the start of school is a stressful and busy time for all, and these extra steps will reduce uncertainties about the safety of drinking water in schools. We also recognize that the testing and flushing processes are new to schools and communities. The Ministries of the Environment and Health and Long-Term Care are reviewing the results and the current processes to further strengthen short-term and long-term responses.

Boards are expected to immediately inform schools about the new processes. We know that staff, parents or community members may have questions, particularly about specific schools with results that exceed the provincial standard. We are attaching a sample letter to parents and here is a question and answer document (www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/water/tapwater/gna.php) that may be helpful for your principals in schools with results that exceed the provincial standard. The Ministry of the Environment's web site (www.ontario.ca/drinkingwater) has a special section that provides useful information that can help answer these questions.

If you require further information, please contact your regional manager.

Original Signed By

Nancy Whynot
Director, Capital Programs Branch

Attachments

Copy: Superintendents of Business and Finance
Senior Plant Officials
Kit Rankin, Director, Field Services Branch
EDU Regional Managers