

General Water Systems Info

NEW MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM WELCOMES ALL!

In response to interest shown at the Source to Tap Water Workshop held April 30, the MIIWSS has opted to change the membership from water systems only, to include all islanders. It is hoped that this inclusive step will attract all who have indicated an ever increasing concern about water issues, be they private well owners, household water users on systems, or purveyors. The annual dues will remain at a modest \$5.00.

The benefits of belonging to an all encompassing group would be the information exchange and updates, broader information collection ability, guest speakers, and increasing the community awareness and education regarding water issues and conservation.

The Board for the 2005 year includes Chair Ev McKay, Vice Chair Jon Sanders, Secretary/Treasurers Diane Plucinak & Frank Birch,, and Directors Don Friessen and Mary Cooper.

To further report on the information gathered at the workshop: attendees were asked to fill out a questionnaire giving guidance to MIIWS in the planning of future goals, and what subject matter is important to them for another workshop.

For the 17 private well owners, the priorities were water treatment, forthcoming legislation, rainwater collection, well disinfection, septic maintenance, gray water re-use, pump maintenance, regular well maintenance , desalinization and speakers from Ministry of Water, Air and Land Protection.

The 16 water systems respondents were interested in water catchment, gray water re-use for households, valves & pipe info, liability issues, course requirements & maintenance of certification, regulation updates, new technology, and system information exchanges.

All 33 stated firmly that they wanted more workshops!

The business addressed at the meeting included plans for an inter-active booth at the fall fair, having information available to the public on water issues, low flush toilet rating information, and the meaning of water tests. Watch the Mayneliner and Tru Valu flyer as plans firm up.

As an aside piece of information , Mayne Island has 12 recognized water systems. They are :

- Campbell Bennett bay Improvement District (Improvement District)
- Bennett Bay Waterworks District (Improvement District)
- Village Point Improvement District (Improvement District)
- Mount Park Estates Improvement District (Improvement District)
- Mount Park Strata (Private)
- Skana Waterworks (CRD)
- Lighthouse Point Improvement District (Improvement District)
- Georgina Improvement District (Improvement District)
- Bakerview Holdings (private)
- Marisol Village (private)
- Surfside (CRD)
- Laura Pont Water Society (private)

There are also many small private purveyors of water to 2 or more homes.

Improvement Districts are governed by the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services & Vancouver Island Health Authority in their daily governance and provision of potable water to their

stakeholders. The legislation under which they act are the Canada Drinking Water Act, the BC Drinking Water Act, and the BC Groundwater Act.

They operate within a defined Letters Patent bordered area. The law states that they MUST provide potable water. They have no other options. While this seems a fairly obvious and reasonable statement of purpose, it gives reason to the concerns expressed by systems when their groundwater recharge areas are imperiled or private wells are sunk into the same aquifer within feet of community wells. It is well to note here that BC is the only province with no legislation to cover this occurrence.

Improvement Districts are governed and managed locally by elected Boards of Trustees, usually 5, but some have 3 and others 7 Trustees. They are a regulating and taxing authorities under BC law, pass and enforce bylaws specific to the operation of their District, and collect water taxes and tolls of varying amounts, set annually by the Board of Trustees and approved by MCAWS. The ability to manage the workings and finance of a district are extensive. For instance, if taxes are not paid, and are 24 months in arrears, they are mandated to notify the property owner that they will be taken to tax sale. They also have the ability, within their bylaw structure, to turn off the water to anyone's home, for none payment of taxes.

The current government has, during their past term, worked and continues to work, towards the elimination of Improvement District status, encouraging IDs to turn over their operations to municipal governments. This removes the ability of the stakeholders in these districts to run their own affairs, determine their maintenance programs, level of taxation, and the ability to involve themselves in the day to day operation of their water supply. It essentially places control of their water system in the hands of Victoria---CRD, in the case of Mayne Island.

Some districts have been compelled to become a Local Service Area (CRD) because of poor past maintenance by private system owners, leading to overwhelming and costly infrastructure repairs and upgrades, or the inability to find stakeholders willing to put the time into serving on the Board of Trustees (as in several districts on Salt Spring). This will become more of a problem on Mayne and all the Gulf Islands as more homes change ownership status from full time residents to off island owners.

The water provided by these systems is tested monthly for fecal and non fecal coliform by the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the reports mailed to the Board Chair. As a consumer, you are entitled to contact your Board for this information.

Currently, all purveyors of water to 2 or more homes must have a certified Small Water Systems Operator operating their system. The base number of homes supplied is currently under review, with the intention of having a more realistic figure.

There are, to date, eleven operators holding certification on Mayne ,with one also holding a Municipal Wastewater Treatment Level 1 certification. The operators are required to keep their certification valid by attending courses regularly, and paying their dues.

All systems are required to file Emergency Response Plans with VIHA, and these must be updated annually by the Board. All infrastructure construction, new or upgrades, must be approved by the VIHA public engineer, with the exception of emergencies and repairs to leaks, of course

So, when you turn on the tap, what comes to you is not as simple as it appears. A lot of work, regulation compliance, care and dedication by fellow islanders has gone into the delivery of a safe food product into your home. It would be most rewarding to approach these volunteers and staff and let them know their efforts are appreciated.

Because of their dedication and diligence, you are the recipient of a safe product at a very reasonable cost !

Mary Cooper, Director,
Mayne Island Integrated water Systems Society