

Case Study: Support and Response Program Helps Shawanaga First Nation

Background

The community of Shawanaga First Nation, located near Parry Sound, had been faced with a devastating water shortage and hundreds of boil water advisories after their two main wells ran dry in 2006. The community was relying on water being trucked in several times a week to top up their supply, when in Spring 2011, they also lost their only certified water plant operator, creating a water quality risk to local residents. It was then that Acting Chief of Shawanaga First Nation, Adam Pawis, put a call in to the Ontario Clean Water Agency's First Nations Technical Support and First Response Program. This program was established in response to a program initiated by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada in 2007 to provide First Nation communities with round the clock access to operational expertise, advice and, if needed, emergency response services. The hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Project Process

OCWA responded to Chief Pawis' request within 24 hours and found a drinking water system in need of significant attention. Along with mechanical problems with the treatment facility, such as alarms that weren't being generated when they should have been, there were also problems with chlorination. Within two months of arrival in the community, OCWA's six-person team had completed a lengthy list of repairs:

- Fixing the chlorine system (including the addition of alarms),
- Replacing the treated flow meter,
- Installing remote monitoring/control and data collection equipment,
- Cleaning the clear wells
- Preparing the Standard Operating Procedures for water truck delivery
- Identifying and working with contractors and the Public Works Department to repair distribution leaks and more

Outcome

Working with the community, OCWA was able to get the facility to the point where a high standard of water quality could be maintained, plant operations could be monitored remotely and emergency staffing levels could be reduced. Both OCWA and Shawanaga realize however, that they are still facing some serious long-term drinking water challenges. With its facility in an improved state of operation, the community is now working with OCWA and consulting firm, S. Burnett and Associates, to address these

long-term issues, most importantly indentifying certified individual(s) who can operate the plant on an ongoing basis and drilling new wells in hopes of addressing the community's chronic water shortage.

The community's long-term plan is to build a surface water treatment plant that would allow it to get water from the surrounding waterways into the taps of its residents. In addition to helping secure the consistency and safety of the drinking water supply for its residents, such a facility could also help pave the way for future growth for the community.

"It's very comforting to know the people looking after your water system truly do care," says Pawis. "It might not be their community, but because they're looking after the plant they feel responsible. They work with our public works people, our water truck drivers, etc. to help us understand the various aspects of the system. And if we call them at 3:30 a.m. – as we've had to do a few times – they're on the road immediately, even if it's in the middle of a snowstorm."

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