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Ontario water bill regulations will be closely watched

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The true impact of Ontario's Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act will be in its regulatory details, say two construction industry stakeholders.

"We have been consistently supportive of this bill and believe it is going in the right direction," said Joe Accardi, executive director of The Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA).

"However, regulations will be the key parts in making this bill a success throughout the province," he said. "Regulations that encourage municipalities to have better asset management and dedicate more funding on their linear infrastructure improvements are needed."

Bill 72 was debated and received third reading on Nov. 18. Queen's Park insiders expect passage of the bill aimed at making Ontario a North American leader in the development and sale of technologies for water conservation and treatment. The bill encourages sustainable infrastructure and conservation planning, including using innovative technologies to solve water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure challenges

"A number of Ontario municipalities have also identified water and wastewater systems as significant energy consumers, reportedly accounting for between 25 to 60 per cent of their electricity bills," said John Wilkinson, Ontario's environment minister during third reading of the bill.

"That cost is passed on through property taxes. So if passed, this act would help municipalities by encouraging water conservation planning as part of municipal water sustainability plans."

A recent **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)** report found that up to 50 per cent of energy used by municipalities, to power their water systems, could be reduced by addressing various sources of system inefficiencies.

The alliance also believes the legislation's regulations will be vital to achieving its intended goals.

“There has to be a lot more details on what a sustainable plan means,” said Andy Manahan, executive director of the RCCAO.

“They can mean different things to different municipalities and that is where regulations will specify what kind of documentation is required,” said “It has to be more than just about operations and it has to include the capital side as well.”

Helena Jaczek, parliamentary assistant to Ontario’s environment minister, said an integrated approach to municipal water infrastructure planning would help achieve long-term system sustainability. The province would help municipalities identify and plan for long-term infrastructure needs. This plan would include a measures and targets approach to demonstrate progress in tackling leakage rates and system inefficiencies, say various stakeholders.

“Although some of our Ontario-based companies are leaders in water treatment technology, we are not at the forefront of asset management throughout the world,” said Accardi.

“This legislation will be a first step to getting our system costs down and improving its efficiencies. Forcing municipalities to look deeper into their infrastructure renewal will start to result in better water conservation.”

As more municipalities implement asset management programs and understand how their assets depreciate and require rehabilitation, this will benefit construction job opportunities, added Accardi.

Both Manahan and Accardi noted that some municipalities have expanded their sewage treatment facilities instead of dealing with other aspects of their system, such as improving combined sewer flows.

“If you deal with that linear aspect and make sure they are in state of good repair, they can save millions of dollars in terms of maintaining the current size of a treatment plant,” said Manahan. “Those sort of connections are important instead of just setting aside money for expansion everywhere in a respective system. Direct the money where there will be the most impact.”