

Sector Comments on Ont. Water Systems Energy, Climate Report

Posted on June 2, 2017

The report, *Every Drop Counts*, released this week by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, is exactly what's needed to move the water and wastewater sectors forward, according to stakeholders.

Indra Maharjan, program manager, Energy Conservation and Climate Change at Ontario Clean Water Agency said, "I strongly believe this report will play a huge role in bringing all stakeholders in this sector to work collaboratively in addressing the gaps and achieving the goal of energy neutrality in the water and wastewater sector, fostering innovation and sharing best practices across the industry."

One of the reports strongest components are its recommendations regarding asset management. "Municipal asset management plans might have to start addressing how water and sewage infrastructure planning is integrated with energy planning," said Andy Manahan, executive director, **Residential & Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

Every Drop Counts recommended that provincial and federal infrastructure funding be contingent on all projects being subjected to energy and carbon life-cycle cost analysis and green infrastructure and non-infrastructure alternatives, such as water conservation. "Public money is precious and scarce. Spending it on things you don't need to do or the things that are going cost more than they should, because you've taken a short-term focus; it's just not a good use of public money," said Dianne Saxe, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

"The report has precisely highlighted the need of combining three pillars of asset management, energy conservation, and resource recovery to achieve the long-term goal of energy efficiency," said Maharjan. "It has elaborated in clear language the gaps in energy consumption data and benchmarking and the unavailability of sector specific incentive programs needed to address these needs."

Energy recovery from water systems is another key recommendation in the report. "Biogas from sewage shows that the environmental initiatives and economic benefits go hand-in-hand, reinforcing the concept of the circular economy, which provincial minister Glen Murray has been advocating," said Manahan.

Commissioner Saxe was equally emphatic on the topic: "Energy in sewage is fairly easy to get

at. We already know how to digest it to get methane.... We can do all kinds of things with methane, including run buses with it.”

“We will have to stop using the term wastewater as this should be viewed as a resource and not a waste,” said Manahan. “This is a significant report, which builds upon the research RCCAO commissioned in 2009 on the linkage between leaky water systems and energy use. With a greater focus on reducing our carbon footprint and saving municipalities money, the recommendations take on even greater importance.”

Janet Bobechko, a senior partner and certified specialist in environmental law with Norton Rose Fulbright Canada said, “The ECO’s Every Drop Counts Report is a focused overview that takes a practical look at the nexus between water and energy usage. For many people the connection is not an obvious one.”

She added that, “The heavy lifting undertaken by the ECO to gather relevant information to examine the issues in a comprehensive manner provides a convincing argument why we need better planning to support water conservation and energy reduction. Ontario’s current government has committed to a Climate Change Action Plan and a waste-free circular economy. The Report identifies existing regulatory requirements in Ontario that if tweaked could provide more useful and timely information. Use of that information could translate into improved forecasting and coordination of resources.

Bobechko noted that recent infrastructure investments could be used to enable efficient energy use and new low carbon energy production and water conservation and efficiency.

“There is an urgent need to educate the public and government to change the dialogue to think about these issues differently. The Report provides some of the necessary support to keep the ball rolling,” she said.