

## Clean water a focus at OSWCA conference

by Don Wall Jan 29, 2016

The quality of our drinking water is top of mind these days with lead contamination in Flint, Mich., the dumping of raw sewage into the St. Lawrence River in Quebec and the paucity of potable water sources in many of Canada's First Nations recently making headlines.



If Giovanni Cautillo, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA), has his way, a cause he intends to champion at the upcoming OSWCA Annual Conference being held in Kingston, Ont. Jan. 31 to Feb. 3 will get similar attention.

"Right now there are 1,100 combined sewer and storm overflow valves that exist that feed into Lake Ontario," said Cautillo, who is active in several other Ontario construction stakeholder bodies including the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association and the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**. "As soon as we have a little bit of precipitation, these overflow valves bypass and don't go into a treatment plant but go right into Lake Ontario.

"That puts raw sewage directly into our source of drinking water."

The situation requires outreach to secure public awareness, lobbying of politicians at all three levels of government and then implementation of a plan, backed by significant funding. The OSWCA is taking a first step at its AGM, inviting Lake Ontario Waterkeeper vice-president

Krystyn Tully to speak at a Monday seminar to address water-quality issues, with a commitment to take the next steps to follow, Cautillo vows.

The alliance between the Waterkeepers and the OSWCA might not seem a natural fit, says Cautillo, but they have a lot in common.

"The reason we have Lake Ontario Waterkeeper there, even though their rationalization for being is different than ours, they want to keep Lake Ontario clean for boating, swimming and the enjoyment of the lake, while we see it as the main source of our fresh water for drinking," he explained. "We say it only makes sense that the source of our drinking water is clean so there is no point in dumping raw sewage into it.

"We just want to raise the status of this, to say, this is something that needs to be done, to the provincial government and municipal governments involved.

"I am proposing a fix."

The OSWCA has been in operation for 45 years and represents over 750 Ontario firms who collectively do over \$1 billion a year in business, according to the association website. The annual meeting serves as an opportunity for the board of directors to report to the members on its lobbying and outreach efforts and provides members with a chance to network and learn about new trends and best practices, says Cautillo.

The host city Kingston will use the occasion to showcase its economic-development accomplishments when Mayor Bryan Paterson, who has been active on various planning and development bodies, speaks at the opening breakfast, and Utilities Kingston president and CEO Jim Keech has also been slotted as a speaker to discuss his 30 years working in electricity and natural-gas distribution and also the water and waterwater sectors.

It's an opportunity to discuss project execution in mid-sized communities, said Cautillo: "Not everything takes place in big cities."

A new initiative this year will be the launch of a trade show, with Cautillo saying the association is taking a "less is more" approach in terms of show size.

"The main driver is to showcase our members," he said. "We want to make sure our members are being spoken to, they can network, and having access to all suppliers in one room is key."

The sewer and watermain industry is unique in this regard, says Cautillo. "There is a lot of competition but also a lot of camaraderie in our sector, a lot of respect between individuals and competitors," he said. "I want to foster that. I want a united voice."

Other seminars will address new technology in the sector and also succession planning. The latter topic is especially important in his sector, Cautillo says, because no one really grows up clamouring to get into the sewer and watermain business so it's crucial to ensure businesses are passed along to the next generation of owners in an orderly fashion.

In terms of legacy content, Cautillo says the OSWCA will begin unveiling components of its 25-year-anniversary comparative review of water-metering, a significant initiative when first studied by the association in 1990. The review, being undertaken by industry heavyweights Michael Fenn and Dr. Harry Kitchen, will be titled "Bringing Sustainability to Ontario's Water System: a Quarter Century of Progress with Much Left to Do."

The study, he said, allows for benchmarking. "Where are we now compared with where we were in 1991 — we are light years ahead of where we were then," he said.

The anniversary- review project is not only for OSWCA members, he said, but for the general public and politicians, so they can understand what the industry does. "The problem is that we do amazing work but we bury it," Cautillo said. "We are out of sight, out of mind and I'll be blunt, we are not a photo opportunity for a politician."