

## Review of contaminated North Okanagan water source leads to recommendations

Residents offer mixed reviews of recommendations to remediate Hullcar Valley aquifer

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A provincially-ordered review has made several recommendations to improve how the province regulates agricultural waste management and the protection of drinking water in light of contamination of an aquifer in B.C.'s Okanagan region.

Since 2014, the North Okanagan's Hullcar Valley aquifer near Spallumcheen has been under a water quality advisory due to high nitrate levels, which can be harmful to human health.

The water quality advisory meant that some people, including pregnant women, babies under six months of age, seniors, and people with immunity, heart, blood, or lung problems were advised to use bottled water, instead of their local tap water.

- [Spallumcheen's drinking water polluted by liquid manure says UVic law centre](#)
- [Review announced for tainted Okanagan water source](#)

A suspected cause of the contamination was liquid manure that was spread on a dairy farm above the aquifer.

According to the province, approximately 250 residents rely on the Hullcar Valley aquifer for drinking water.

### 'Government is listening,' says minister

The review was ordered by the province last summer following complaints from residents and advocacy groups. It was written by a team of researchers, led by Oliver Brandes of the University of Victoria.

Environment Minister George Heyman said the report presents solid recommendations, based on the best available information.

"The government is listening and we have already begun to implement the report's recommendations," Heyman said in statement.

The report makes nine recommendations to bring down nitrate levels in the Hullcar Valley to acceptable levels, and improve regulatory mechanisms to prevent similar contamination from taking place in other British Columbia aquifers.

One of the recommendations is a temporary moratorium on the use of liquid manure.

Others include regulatory updates, water sustainability plans, increased accountability, and consideration of alternative drinking water sources.

### Advocates criticize recommendations

"We are hopeful that this process will lead the government to help remediate the nitrate-contaminated aquifer and to finally proactively protect all of B.C.'s surface and groundwater for future generations," said Brian Upper with Steele Springs Waterworks District.

However, Al Price, chair of the Save Hullcar Aquifer Team, says some of these recommendations aren't forceful enough, noting the group wanted a permanent moratorium on spraying liquid manure until the aquifer was remediated, as well as the removal of a dairy farm's underground pipeline that transports manure.

The province says it will address all aspects of the report in the coming months.

With files from [Radio West](#)

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