

Argricultural Waste November 30, 2017 6:27 pm

Province pledges new rules for agricultural waste following aquifer contamination report



By Megan Turcato

North Okanagan Reporter Global News

The nitrate contamination of the Hullcar Aquifer has been impacting the drinking water of roughly 250 people in the north Okanagan for years.

Thursday, the B.C. government released an independent report it commissioned on the issue which spelled out recommendations for change.

The provincial government is pledging action, however the nitrate problem in the aquifer isn't expected to go away quickly.

"There are nine recommendations in the report. We are accepting them all broadly," said B.C. Environment Minister George Heyman.

The high nitrate levels in the aquifer have, in part, been blamed on farms putting animal waste and chemical fertilizer on fields for years.

The province is promising new regulation of agricultural waste before the next growing season.

"The regulation will give the ministry... the power to impose a moratorium on liquid manure spraying when it poses a threat to water," said Heyman.

However, the report concludes that "there is likely a very significant time lag, with nitrates from past farming practices contributing to the recent contamination of local drinking water," and "nitrate levels in the Hullcar Aquifer are unlikely to drop significantly in the near future."

The province said it is working with local officials to find alternative sources of drinking water.

"We want to remediate the Hullcar Aquifer, specifically provide alternate water sources for people until that water is clean again. And we want to work with agricultural producers so that this kind of conflict is removed and they can carry on their very important activities in a way that's environmentally sound," said Heyman.

The head of a local advocacy group, Al Price, is one of those who have been living with a water quality advisory for well over three years because of the nitrate levels in their water.

"It is frustrating and it is expensive," said Price. "We pay over \$800 a year for water... that we can't drink."

He sees the independent report released Thursday as a chance to turn the corner on the long standing issue.

"We are cautiously optimistic but also cautiously pessimistic because we've been promised things before that haven't been delivered," said Price.

The B.C. Agriculture Council said they've been working with government on updating regulations for some time and are committed to protecting the environment.