

The Walkerton Inquiry  
Expert Meeting on  
“Guiding Principles for Drinking Water Safety:  
Risk Management and Risk Communication Aspects”

Ryerson University  
April 19-20, 2001  
Chair: William Leiss

DRAFT AGENDA

- A. Introduction of Participants (all).
- B. Review of Agenda Items and Conduct of the Meeting (chair).

Discussion of Substantive Issues:

- C. Risk Management Issues, I: Roles and Accountability.

The actors for drinking water safety (DWS) include: the public, communities, water suppliers, governments as regulators, governments as advisors, sellers of industrial technologies and professional services, and others. Who is responsible for what, specifically where the management of drinking water risks is involved? Who or what ensures that the roles of all actors fit together into a seamless structure for drinking water safety? How does formal law and regulation co-exist with a risk management approach? **What are the requirements for accountability for the various actors, and, in particular, how does (or should) a risk management approach distribute accountability among the actors?**

- D. Risk Management Issues, II: The Precautionary Approach.

There are today vigorous debates on the meaning of what is called a precautionary approach (PA). What are, for the interested parties assembled for this meaning, some important aspects of the definition of a PA? **More specifically, what meanings can be attached to a precautionary approach in the context of DWS itself**, and also as an aspect of a risk management framework for DWS? What institutions, policy frameworks, or legal and regulatory structures are needed in order to implement a precautionary approach to drinking water safety? In the context of DWS, is a “precautionary” approach the same thing as a “sustainable” approach? If not, what are the significant differences between them?

#### E. Risk Communication Issues, I: Transparency, Access, Reporting.

What are the requirements for transparency and access to information in a risk management framework for DWS? What types of information should be provided, by whom, to whom, in what formats, and when? How much information is enough, and how detailed should it be? How is the reliability of information to be assessed (for example, through third-party auditing provisions)?

#### F. Risk Management Issues, III: Risk Assessment and Perception of Risk.

In a conventional risk management approach, risks must be assessed (for example, first identified and then classified as to their type and magnitude) before they can be managed. **What outstanding issues are there, among interested parties, concerning the way in which risks associated with drinking water are now assessed in Canada?** Are there different approaches to risk assessment and, if so, what consequences (if any) flow from them for the way in which such risks should be managed? Do public perceptions of drinking water risks also have consequences for the management of those risks? Is it necessary to seek to change or influence public perceptions of drinking water risks, and if so, why?

#### G. Risk Communication Issues, II: Best Practices in Emergencies.

The public's awareness of DWS issues is strongly conditioned by disease outbreaks which become public health emergencies. Timely delivery of the right kinds of information and directives is vitally important in these emergencies: What do we know about best practices in this area? Are the necessary information and resources available in Canadian communities to sustain best practices? What are the "background" information delivery requirements needed to ensure that directives issued to the public in emergencies are understood and carried out promptly?

#### H. Concluding Overview: The Goals of Risk Management for DWS.

Ideally, good risk management for DWS could be viewed as a "partnership" between (a) governments and suppliers, acting in the interests of public safety and environmental protection, and (b) citizens, whose own awareness of risk factors, and access to pertinent information, allows them to make informed choices about the adequacy of a risk management regime ("informed consent"). What are the necessary conditions for this partnership to work effectively? For example, is the government/supplier role to minimize the risk from drinking water to such an extent that the well-informed person on the street would have confidence in the safety of drinking water? And is the public's role to ensure that it has the resources to hold those other parties accountable for the safety of drinking water?