



## Threatened Water Fact Sheet

1. While Canada has 7% of the world's renewable freshwater supply (20%, if we are counting underground aquifers and glaciers), many First Nations communities do not have access to safe drinking water.

2. Health Canada issues 3 types of drinking water advisories, depending on the severity of the contaminants:

**Boil Water Advisory:** When the water is safe to drink after it has reached a rolling boil for a least 1 minute. Ex. When the water contains faecal pollution.

**Do Not Consume:** When the water is not drinkable, even after it has been boiled, because the contaminants cannot be removed by boiling. Ex. When there is lead in the water.

**Do Not Use:** When the pollutants in the water are so dangerous that even touching the water could irritate skin, eyes, nose, etc. Ex. When there has been a serious chemical spill nearby.

3. Water advisories are either short term, meaning they last less than 12 months, or long term, meaning they last longer than 12 months. In many places, the community has more than 1 advisory at a time, or a series of recurring short-term advisories.

4. Poor water quality can cause several health issues such as birth defects, waterborne illnesses, skin problems, and several types of cancer.



5. Lack of access to clean water can also make other existing problems worse. For example, a family living in extreme poverty who is also

under a Do Not Consume Advisory has two choices. 1: They could purchase bottled water, making finances even tighter. 2: Drink the water anyway and pay the health consequences down the road. Consider also, restaurants and other businesses may have to close for the duration of the advisory.

6. As of November 2021, 71 First Nations communities were under drinking water advisories. Many had more than one advisory. The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte in Tyendinaga had the largest active number of water advisories, with a total of 5 in effect. The community was under a boil water advisory for over 10 years, due to the lack of infrastructure.

7. As of November 1st 2021, Ontario had more drinking water advisories than all other provinces and territories combined.

8. In 2015, the Canadian Federal Government vowed to end all boil water advisories on public water systems on Canadian reserves within 5 years. As of July 18 2022, there are still 27 communities living with long term drinking water advisories. Therefore, the Federal Government has not yet met its target.

9. In Tyendinaga, many people still rely on wells, over half of which have tested positive for E. coli and fecal bacteria. When there are droughts, people's wells can become dried up, meaning they must travel to other towns to buy jugs of water.



10. Kashechewan: Kashechewan First Nation is a Cree community on the shores of James Bay. It is also home to one of Canada's most high-profile water crises since the turn of the century. In 2005, after years of being under a boil water advisory, Kashechewan residents were forced to evacuate because of E. coli in the water.

11. Because Kashechewan is so remote, it is difficult for people to bring in water from outside sources like they do in Tyendinaga. As a result of this, about 60% of the community had to be temporarily located to Timmins.

12. Water in the Kashechewan territory also had very high chlorine levels which caused temporary skin conditions such as eczema and scabies. The high-profile situation actually helped the community, as the whole country turned its eyes to Kashechewan. This pressured the government to attempt to resolve the issue.

13. Later in 2005, Kashechewan received a new water treatment plant. The plant helps to produce some safe and clean water for people to drink, however, it did not resolve the problem.

14. In 2017, the community was forced to relocate further upriver. Additionally, every year when the ice melts in the spring, the local waters become contaminated.

15. Kashechewan residents had to evacuate every year between 2012 and 2019.



16. *"The story of my people, the Grassy Narrows First Nations, weighs heavily on the collective conscience of Canada. For over half a century, mercury poison has contaminated the river that is our lifeblood."*

- Grassy Narrows Grand Chief Simon Fobister Sr. June 6, 2016.  
The Star.

17. Grassy Narrows: The Grassy Narrows incident is still widely considered as one of the worst cases of environmental poisoning in Canadian history. Between 1962 and 1970, the Dryden Chemical Company released an uncontrolled amount of mercury into the vast river system, which includes the Wabagoon River.

18. Grassy Narrows First Nation, a fishing-based community where people would often eat fish every day, is less than 100 km downstream from where the plant was.

19. The Wabaseemoong/Whitedog community is further downstream but also suffered from the effects of the contamination in the Wabagoon River. Now, over half a century later, it is still highly contaminated.

20. For generations, Indigenous people in this area have experienced mercury poisoning, Minamata disease, and devastating blows to the fishing and aqua-tourism industries.

21. For Anishinaabe people, Water Walking is a way to thank the waters for all that they give and to raise awareness about the importance of protecting the water. Today, many Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people take part in Water Walking to honour water.



22. Mother Earth Water Walks began with a group of Anishinaabe women. In Anishinaabe teachings, as well as in many other Indigenous communities, women have a special connection to water.

23. In Anishinaabeg teachings, women were originally given the role of taking care of the water and men were given the role of taking care of the fire. With this, women have both a physical and spiritual connection to water.

24. In the walks for Water, women lead the ceremony and carry a copper pail that is filled with water from one place to the next. Often throughout these walks, men show their support of the women by carrying an eagle staff.

25. The first Annual Mother Earth Water Walk began on April 21, 2003 when Josephine Mandamin, along with 8 other walkers started on their journey around Lake Superior. The Water Walkers come together in ceremony to walk around each of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River to sing and pray to the water, while raising awareness to the importance of taking care of water.

26. Josephine Mandamin (1942-2019)-Anishinaabekwe of Wikwemikong First Nation on Manitoulin Island was an influential advocate for water protection and a residential school survivor. During her lifetime, she served as the Anishinabek Chief Water Commissioner and played a significant role in the Mother Earth Water Walks, advocating and praying for the water.

27. Autumn Peltier is a clean water activist and the current Chief Water Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation. She carries on the work of her Great Aunt, Josephine Mandamin, protecting and advocating for the water.



28. The first annual water walk was prompted in 2000 when Grand Chief Bawdwayadu told the prophecy that water would cost as much as an ounce of gold by 2030 if we continued with our negligence. He then asked those at the Sundance Ceremony, "What are you going to do about it?". From this, Mother Earth Water Walkers emerged as a group of Anishinaabe women who came together in 2003 to raise awareness about the sacredness of water.

29. Josephine Mandamin walked more than 17,000 km advocating for water protection and participated in her final water walk in 2017, which took place over the course of 97 days.

30. "We are water- we come from water and when the water is sick- we are sick" – *Autumn Peltier*

31. "If we discontinue our negligence, we can change things around. That's why I am really embodying the prophecy. You've heard of 'Walk The Talk,' this is why I walk" -*Josephine Mandamin*