



The capital costs for addressing the problems detected in high and medium risk water and wastewater systems are estimated between \$475 million and \$560 million.<sup>3</sup> **About 5,300 houses don't have basic water and sewer services and it will cost roughly \$185 million to provide these.**<sup>4</sup> These projected costs are lower than the \$1.4 billion estimated by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 that should be spent annually for 10 years.

Band Councils, Health Canada and INAC share the responsibility for providing water and wastewater services to First Nations. While INAC provides funding, Health Canada works with First Nations communities to monitor the quality of drinking water. Some First Nations communities share services with neighbouring municipalities. When water is found to be unsafe for drinking, Health Canada will advise the Chiefs and Councils to announce Boil Water Advisories.

First Nations community water and wastewater systems are different in the number of homes they serve, their level of complexity and the method of water treatment. Chlorine is the most common disinfectant in water treatment. A lagoon (an artificial pool) is the most common way to treat community wastewater.

Every region is creating its own action plan to address the major problem areas. Because most First Nations communities draw their water source from surface water (rivers and lakes) and wells, the quantity and quality of the water can change, especially with economic development and population growth. Water availability can be reduced during dry seasons. Water can be contaminated by farm fertilizers and pesticides, recreational activities on lakes, oil, and gas. Some actions can be taken to reduce potential risks, like: improving operation and management practices such as how feasibility and engineering studies are conducted, upgrading, repairing and replacing existing systems and equipment, providing backup equipment, supplies and electrical power.

INAC is aiming for all water and sewer facility operators to be certified by 2006. Only 10 per cent of current operators meet this requirement. The Department will also be creating enforceable water standards, launching a national campaign to raise First Nations' awareness of water issues, and building a national database to store information on water and wastewater systems in First Nations communities.

Where you can find more information:

- INAC Directive on water and sewage systems: [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/hsg/cih/ci/pd\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/hsg/cih/ci/pd_e.html)
- INAC, Safe Drinking Water on First Nations Reserves – Roles and Responsibilities: [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/hsg/cih/ci/ic/wg/wqr\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/hsg/cih/ci/ic/wg/wqr_e.html).
- Canadian Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/water/index.htm>. You can also look to your province/territory for their respective standards.

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*Cette information est également disponible en français.*

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1995, INAC has committed over \$560 million to upgrade and expand water and sewer services, in addition to the \$100 million to \$125 million annual budget. More monies were spent through *Gathering Strength*, the Rust-Out Initiative and the Canada Infrastructure Program.

<sup>4</sup> Ongoing support and future expansion would cost \$90 million to \$100 million per year. All estimates are based on visual inspections only.