

There are two major problems facing Alberta's water supply now and in the near future. First and most obvious is pollution, and the need to ensure a clean, reliable source of potable water. Second is the demand for more water in the south of the province, where farmers are regularly faced with crippling droughts. Steps are being taken to provide solutions to both problems, but they may not be sufficient in the long term.

In Edmonton, our biggest problem is what Dr. Steve Hrudey of the U of A calls "the soup of crud and spills" that emits from our storm sewers, especially in the springtime.

The North Saskatchewan River,

in the middle of February this year. Note its ugly brown shade, complete with trash, dog droppings, road salt, soot, oil, and whatever else there may be. Now imagine taking that snow into your house, melting it, and drinking the water. That is the challenge facing the city of Edmonton's water treatment facilities annually. That is why Dr. Hrudey's recent report on Edmonton drinking water states: "The only specific action which is clearly recommended for immediate action is the relocation of the Rossdale intake."

Moving the Rossdale intake upstream to the E.L. Smith intake, outside the city sewer system, will cost 46 million dollars, or a maximum of

parts per billion in some samples."

Moving the intake would also sidestep the problem created last week when an unknown source dumped toxic chemicals into the storm sewer system, shutting down the Rossdale plant until the spill was cleaned up. Where does this leave downstream communities like Prince Albert?

Dr. Hrudey had the following answer: "Nature has been putting up with man for a long time. The storm sewer discharges in Edmonton, because of the close proximity to the intakes, allows very little dilution, very little time for natural processes (to break down the chemicals). There are no continuous discharges, which could be a problem."

Basically, Dr. Hrudey summarized his report as concluding that "99 percent of the time, the North Saskatchewan is an excellent source of raw water," and that "Edmonton drinking water is as good or better than any Canadian or world standards."

Not everyone is completely happy with the idea of moving the intake upstream, however. When told of the problem, environmental writer Michael Keating said, "In a way I think that's great, it's the best thing in the world. People should be able to say their effluent is so clean that we don't have to worry about it." It should be pointed out that Mr. Keating lives in Toronto, downstream from a lot of storm

Keating also said that it is essential for prairie cities to be "squeaky clean upstream", due to the size of our rivers. "Even the South Saskatchewan, the biggest river on the

Take a look at the snow in the city in the middle of February this year. Note its ugly brown shade, complete with trash, dog droppings...

like most rivers, gets loaded every spring with bacteria. Rotting vegetable matter, mainly from leaves, is washed downstream in the runoff, and urban water treatment facilities strain to purify this water for drinking. This problem is compounded in Edmonton, however, by the location of the Rossdale water treatment plant. The Rossdale intake is downstream from 85 storm sewer outlets. This means that every spring, in addition to the naturally occurring runoff, we also drink Edmonton's city runoff.

Take a look at the snow in the city

three dollars per month per water bill by 1996, according to city Water and Sanitation figures.

This would alleviate the problem greatly, but it is not a solution. There are naturally occurring compounds in water which, when oxidized, produce "taste and odor problems," said Dr. Hrudey. He pointed out that one of the basic purifying chemicals for water "is a strong oxidant". This combination will produce a taste and smell "characteristic of malt", he said. This is noticeable "at the level of parts per billion, and we have hundreds of

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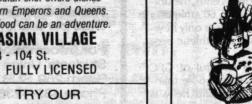
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